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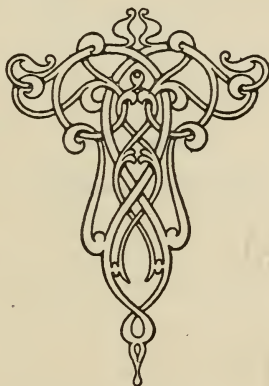
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Evangelistic Committee.

EVANGELISTIC SERMONS



TOGETHER WITH PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE AFTER-MEETING

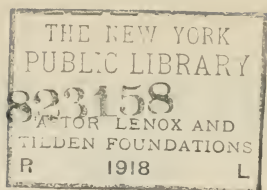


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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE CALL TO THE HEIGHTS	11
CHARLES CARROLL ALBERTSON, D.D.	
II. A MARVELOUS OVERTURE	23
W. WRAY BOYLE, D.D.	
III. FAITH'S PART	37
JOHN E. BUSHNELL, D.D.	
IV. ALMOST PERSUADED	55
JOSEPH P. CALHOUN, D.D.	
V. A MODEL PREACHER AND A GREAT SERMON	69
J. WILBUR CHAPMAN, D.D.	
VI. ELDER-BROTHERLINESS	85
JOSEPH WILSON COCHRAN, D.D.	
VII. GOD AND LOVE AND LIFE ETERNAL	101
ROBERT F. COYLE, D.D., LL.D.	
VIII. MAKE JESUS KING	117
WILLIAM P. FULTON, D.D.	
IX. THE INCONSISTENCIES OF SATAN	131
W. BEATTY JENNINGS, D.D.	
X. SANCTIMONIOUS EXCUSES	143
A. EDWIN KEIGWIN, D.D.	
XI. THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER	157
J. BEVERIDGE LEE, D.D.	
XII. NO IMPOSSIBILITIES WITH GOD	173
HENRY COLLIN MINTON, D.D., LL.D.	
XIII. THE REDEMPTION OF DINAH	185
FORD C. OTTMAN, D.D.	
XIV. A CERTAIN FAITH	195
S. S. PALMER, D.D.	
XV. CHRIST FORSAKEN UPON THE CROSS	209
WILLIAM H. ROBERTS, D.D., LL.D.	
XVI. THE TWO DOORS	225
JOHN BALCOM SHAW, D.D., LL.D.	
XVII. WAGES OR A GIFT	239
ROBERT WATSON, D.D.	
XVIII. THE SECOND SON	259
EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, D.D.	
XIX. THE AFTER-MEETING	277
J. WILBUR CHAPMAN, D.D.	
XX. CONDITIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL AFTER-MEETING	289
JOHN BALCOM SHAW, D.D., LL.D.	

FOREWORD

The sermons in this collection are mostly contributed by the members of the General Assembly's Committee on Evangelistic Work, and are compiled under the direction of the Sub-Committee on Literature. There are added suggestions as to the conduct of evangelistic services.

The volume is sent out to ministers and Christian workers in the hope that the contents will be helpful and inspiring to all who realize that the main purpose of preaching should be to win souls by showing the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, the only and all-sufficient Savior.

JOHN H. CONVERSE,
Chairman General Assembly's Committee
on Evangelistic Work.



I

THE CALL TO THE HEIGHTS

CHARLES CARROLL ALBERTSON, D.D.

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I

THE CALL TO THE HEIGHTS

"O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God."—ISAIAH xl. 9. (R. V.)

THE office of the Hebrew prophet was not merely to foretell, but to forth-tell, to tell forth to men the will of God. Their voice was sometimes the voice of Destiny, telling what shall be in the fullness of time. But it was oftener the voice of Duty, telling what ought to be now.

Isaiah is first among Hebrew prophets in the splendor of his poetic speech, and in the loftiness of his spirit. Seven hundred years before the Star of Bethlehem showered its silver on the Judean night, he had caught the gleam of the day it heralded, and in his grasp of spiritual truth he is as one who has already seen the Christ. As there were reformers before the reformation, so there were Christians before Christ. They saw from afar "the consolation of Israel," and their hearts were glad. Isaiah was such an one. That is the secret of his buoyancy. He was not blind to the social and political corruption of the age. No man saw more clearly than he, and he kept not silence. But he saw more. He saw "the increasing purpose" of God, running through the ages, and the thoughts of men growing wider and the world

growing readier for the coming of its King. There is your true optimist. He is not, as one has said, "one who does not care what happens, so it does not happen to him." He is simply one who sees farther than his fellows. He hears sounds to which other ears are deaf, like the little Scotch girl, whose senses had grown keen in long illness, who, at the siege of Lucknow, heard the pipers miles away, as British troops marched to the rescue of the city.

It is wonderful how far you can see from a mountain. In the northern part of the Adirondacks there is a peak, from the summit of which, on a clear day, one can see not alone the neighboring Adirondacks, but the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Yonder narrow strip of green is Lake Champlain. To the west is a silvery ribbon—that is the St. Lawrence, dotted with a thousand islands, while yonder—north and east—are the spires of Montreal. On such a mountain stood the man of God who looked across to Canaan ere he closed the long heroic record of his life. To the watchman on such a mountain, a dweller in the valley called out: "What of the night?" and got the answer, "The morning cometh while yet the night remains." To the prophet, in the city or in the temple-courts, God's Spirit calls, in the text, saying, "Get thee up to a high mountain." This is "the call to the heights." And it is God's call to every human soul.

1. *It Is the Call to Clear Vision.*—How easily the problems of the present blind us to the issues of the

future. When the Franco-Prussian war began a messenger awakened Von Moltke at midnight with the news that the French army had taken the field with the cry, "On to Berlin." He said, "My orders are in the desk, in the pigeonhole at the right. Please see that they are issued." And he slept on until morning. His plans were already made. The war was ended before it began, and, practically, the Germans were in Paris long before Sedan, just because they were rich in men of vision. "Napoleon the Little" was also "Napoleon the Blind."

August 27, 1858, Lincoln and Douglas held their second joint debate at Freeport. At a conference of republican leaders the night before, Lincoln announced his intention of forcing Douglas on the morrow to declare himself on the question whether a territorial legislature had or had not the power to exclude slavery. He was counseled not to do so, for it was foreseen that Douglas could make but one answer, and that his position would make him popular in Illinois, and win for him the senatorship. But Lincoln said: "I am after larger game. The battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this." He foresaw that the very declaration which would win the senatorship for Douglas would lose him the presidency, and it did, for it hopelessly divided the democratic party. It is not at all likely that Lincoln expected to be elected president in two years, but he expected that some republican would be elected president on that issue. No man in modern times has possessed the prophetic

spirit in larger measure than he. Some one said of him during the war, "There was always a far-away look in his eyes." His soul was far away. He was a watchman on the mountain.

If we look for such a man beyond the sea, we find him in Gladstone, of whom Bunsen said, "He has heard higher tones than anyone else in the land." By which he meant that Gladstone's mind was habitually possessed by a higher consciousness than that of others.

The best thing about this life of ours is that it has the capacity for height. By one path or another, by poverty or by pain, by discipline of the mind or of the soul, by study of the works or the Word of God, by the passion for service or the power of prayer, or by all of these combined, we may rise until the earth seems but a little thing, and heaven not far away. Is not this the poet's meaning?

"I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

The problem of life, then, above all else, is this: how to regulate our habits of thought and action, how to fulfil the duties and suffer the sorrows of time, so that by these we may attain at length "the firm resolve, the temperate will," the habit of seeing things from the highest possible view-point. It is a great thing to stand where you may see things from above. It is like standing on a summit,

with the clouds below you, and the thunders rolling at your feet. Below are unrest and terror, but above is calm. How different death would seem from the heavenly view-point! In what a new light sorrow would shine forth!

A man who had reached the heights of peace and power said: "I was born in poverty, and I had a withered arm from birth, but it never dawned upon me until I was fourteen, that narrow circumstances and a bodily disability were just what I needed to make the most of my powers. It was when I said to my father, 'I am poor and lame,' and he said, quoting Scripture, 'The lame shall take the prey.' Then I saw that what I had always thought of as weights might turn out to be wings." When that awakening comes to us, we have begun to ascend. The office of religion is just this: to point to the high mountain and remind us that there is our home. History says, "Look back." Science says, "Look around." Philosophy says, "Look in." Religion says, "Look up. Get thee up on a high mountain."

A psalmist declares, "Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet." Have you ever seen a stag, outlined against the sky, sure-footed on the far off cliff? The mountain is its home. So, what the psalmist says is this, "By faith, I stand on high, serene and strong."

II. "*Thou That Tellest Good Tidings.*"—This is the message of the prophet, and the prophet is the teacher of religion. This is the character of his message, it is good tidings. Is not this the very term the New Tes-

tament applies to the Gospel, "Evangelism," good tidings? We get our words "evangel," "evangelist," "evangelical," from that word which means good news. At first the word meant a present given on account of good news. In Attic Greek, it meant a sacrifice offered on receipt of good news, but in the New Testament, it means the good news itself. Strange it is that the gospel of good tidings has ever been interpreted so as to convey to men any other impression than that it is good tidings. The Master Himself made it clear that He came not to condemn the world, but to save it from condemnation; not to curse the world, but to remove the curse; not to limit life, but to enlarge it. Long ago it had become a proverb, "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." That is what Christianity is. It is what the Son of Man came to tell us.

The two things that the world has most wished for in moments of fancy are the philosopher's stone, to turn base metal into gold, and the fountain of perpetual youth in which the time-worn pilgrim may wash away the scars of years. If such things were real, who would not make any pilgrimage, pay any price, to obtain the one and reach the other? Men have grown gray and some have even lost their reason trying to solve the problem of transmuting metals. The discoverer of Florida was an aged soldier who thought to find there the fabled waters. O, sons of earth, what if these dreams be but the shadows of things that are? What if in this Book there be the

basis of a faith that *does* turn the common things of life into the gold of the soul? And what if here we may learn the secret of eternal life? Then it is good tidings, indeed. Well, many have found it so. Close beside the bitter fountain in the wilderness grows the sweetening branch. The smitten rock, from which gushed forth the river, was but a symbol of Him who said at Jacob's well: "The water I give you shall be in you a well of water springing up into eternal life." Good news!

The deepest hunger, the keenest thirst we know, is for truth. Burdened with sin, we cry, "Is forgiveness possible?" When woe fills to overflowing the cup of life, when disaster follows disaster, and the plans we have made come crashing down about us, we say: "Is there a Father who knows and cares? Has He comfort and strength for us now?" Sitting in darkened chambers beside our dead, we ask: "Is there another life where the broken strands of this shall be re-knit?" If any man can answer these questions to our rational satisfaction, how glad and thankful we will be! Then glad and thankful we should be, for One has answered them. He speaks as one who knows. He has the accent of authority and the tone of power. There is no halt in His gait or haze in His eyes as He calmly speaks of pardon, and inward reinforcement, and the Father's many mansions. He is not afraid, and His servants should not be.

III. *Lift Up Thy Voice With Strength. Be Not Afraid.*—Observe the positiveness of the message, and

the consequent boldness of the messenger. But why should we be afraid? What have we to fear? You say, "There is so much to fear; there is the paralyzing consciousness of the overmastering power of things present and visible; there is the tyranny of flesh and sense; there is the bold denial of materialism; there is the supercilious sneer of Epicureanism. There is the colossal conceit of Rationalism; and, worst of all, there is the insidious strain of skepticism in us all which meets the affirmatives of faith with the thought, 'It is too good to be true.' " What are we to do? The text answers, "Lift up thy voice with strength. Be not afraid." Say to them that are of a fearful heart, "Nothing is too good to be true if God is its author." And God is the author of the Gospel of His Son.

IV. *Say to the Cities of Judah, Behold Your God.*
—Has the city then a special need of this message? Was there a city problem so long ago? Rome was not yet built, it was just beginning. There were a few shepherds' huts along the Tiber. Where the great cities of the modern world stand was untraversed wilderness. But there was Jerusalem. And Tyre and Sidon and Damascus and Babylon were great. Then, as now, there were wealth and poverty, virtue and vice, the strong and the weak, the oppressor and the oppressed, side by side. Then, as now, the wicked flourished, and corruption promised large dividends; then, as now, the glutton feasted, and the beggar waited at his gate; then, as now, the successful man

said to his soul, "Soul, take thine ease;" then, as now, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life all too easily blotted out the vision of the Ideal; then, as now, organized society needed a Savior and so, to the cities of Judah, the prophet must cry "Behold your God!"

Can the thought of God cure the ills of the city, our city, where commerce dominates everything, and industry is personified by the man with a muck rake, or the man with a hoe? Can the thought of God save New York and London, Paris and Chicago, Peking and San Francisco? No, but the thought of God can uplift the minds of men, and clarify their vision until they see that only as the grace of God enters into human life, only as the presence of God becomes a restraining and constraining force, can there be any individual worth or social greatness. The vision of Paul saved many a city of Asia Minor. The vision of Savonarola saved Florence. The vision of Luther saved Europe. The vision of Wesley saved England from a reign of terror. And Christ was the center of that saving vision.

The city is to be saved only as the individuals of which it is composed are saved. Each of us can help to build the city in righteousness by practicing the Gospel of God Incarnate. The history of our race began in the country—in Eden. But it is to end in the city—New Jerusalem. Midway between Eden and New Jerusalem is Babylon. We are in Babylon now. But every life hid with Christ in God, every

soul devoted to the will of God, every "union of those who love in the service of those who suffer," is helping to transform earth's Babylon into God's New Jerusalem.

II

A MARVELOUS OVERTURE

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II

A MARVELOUS OVERTURE

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me."—REVELATION iii. 20.

IN Holman Hunt's wonderfully suggestive picture, "The Light of the World," a distinguished personage, who wears a royal mantle clasped by a priestly breast-plate, is represented standing outside a walled enclosure in the night-time and knocking at a door, over which the wild vine and the bramble have grown. The personage is the Savior of mankind, and the dress is significant. He is the King-priest of a purchased people. The attitude is significant. He stands, ready to enter, and, yet, ready if compelled, to go away. The language is significant—the word, "behold," is the very word used by the Eastern traveler as he knocks at the door of a caravansery, and, also, by an officer of justice, who, impatient of delay, knocks with his staff.

Self-satisfied Laodicea, to whom this appeal is made, may represent two distinct attitudes of life with reference to the overtures of grace, both of them attitudes of indifference: the indifference of a non-confessor to a waiting Savior's condescension, and the indifference of those who have professed Him to the Savior's desire for larger room in the thought and affection and devotion of life.

I. Study the first of these conditions—a sovereign Savior at a sinner's heart-door and the door shut. Naturally, the things of time and sense do not need to beg for entrance there; wide open stands the gate, and warm is the welcome. The siren of passing pleasure chants her alluring song and enters; the mammon of perishable dividends chinks his gold and enters; the puppet of a mere temporary glory blows his trumpet and enters, and, with all these, if sought for as ends in themselves, enter dissatisfaction and unrest, while condescending Love, with endless satisfactions in his gift, finds all too frequently, a pre-occupied mind and an estranged heart. A writer in a recent review, in seeking to account for the fact that only twenty-five per cent. of the population of New York City was in attendance upon divine worship in all the churches on a recent Sunday, says, in summing up: "The insistent push of the material which leaves men's minds unfit for thinking soberly, the restless demand for new excitement in the realm of amusement, with Saturday night the crowning revel, must account for the fact of an unchurched seventy-five per cent., practically godless in a land that acknowledges God and Christless, with the emblem of the cross everywhere in sight." Side by side, make a note of this: A traveler in the Orient, sitting on a broken pillar of an old-time temple, wrote this into his story of lost cities: "This is Laodicea's grave, and she, herself, dug it. She thought she could be a Christian and still besport herself with her old-time idolatries. This broken

pillar is her only monument, and history has written the epitaph: 'Laodicea was too busy amusing herself to let Christ in when He knocked.' "

And, whether or not we are deeply impressed by what is written between the lines of this old-time degeneracy or a present-day condition which in many respects resembles it, we must take our places at the Master's side as He knocks for admission at the hearts of men and recognize the reality of two things:—

First. The world's need of what He has to offer. Of Him it is written in the Gospel, "He knew what was in man"—the downgrade tendency native to him, and, at the same time, the strange, half-stifled yearning which instinctively pleads for something better than the world supplies. It was not by mere accident that Nicodemus came to him in his speculative mood, that the rich young lawyer came to him with serious questions about life-values, that Magdalene came to Him with a fragment of her best nature still worthy of His love. Spiritual necessity compelled them, divineness drew them. There is a Russian folk-story told of one who entered a diamond mine in quest of riches. His pockets he filled with precious stones, and, forthwith, flung them away to make room for larger ones. Becoming intensely thirsty, he was dismayed to find that there was no water. In a delirium of suffering he fancied he could hear the flow of rivers, but they proved to be rivers of gems, cascades of jewels. There was only one thing in the whole world sufficient to the exigency of that moment; and, in the supreme mo-

ment of a soul's need, when an immortal faculty asks after permanent satisfaction, there is only one source of supply adequate to the need. As little can you satisfy soul-thirst with morals and mathematics as you can satisfy a physical thirst with a cascade of jewels. The physical nature demands nutriment, the intellectual nature demands knowledge, the social nature demands fellowship and the whole nature demands Christ. In the day of his own temptation He said, "Man cannot live by bread alone"—that is, by the visible and tangible and buyable things. And, knowing well the disposition of man to overlook realities, he makes the appeal, "I stand at the door and knock."

Second. In this merciful attitude we discover that the overtures are overtures of love. "Behold, I stand at the door", is the voice of a petitioner, and not of a judge. His spirit is interpreted by the hymnist in this:

"Oh lovely attitude, He stands
With melting heart and laden hands."

He knocks at the door of hope. He sees life's aspiring tendrils fixing themselves to things that cannot endure, like ivy clinging to a decaying tree-trunk, and, appealing with the solicitude of a friend, he says: "Destined to live forever, fix your hopes upon that which endures forever."

He knocks at the door of affection. The uncovered head in the artist's conception is the same head that was wet with the dews of Olivet as he pleaded for a lost humanity through a whole night of prayer. The

waiting feet are the wounded feet, and the knocking hand is the pierced hand. The yearning heart is the broken heart.

"The Man of Nazareth, 'tis He,
With garments dyed on Calvary."

He knocks at the door of reason. Christianity in Christ invites an investigation of its merits. It says to doubt or prejudice or indifference, "Come, let us reason together." It has passed already through the most sifting ordeals, and fears not now the keenest analysis of its creed and character. Justly it points to the civilizations it has established, to the reforms it has inaugurated, to the generousities it has awakened, to the homes it has sanctified, to the loves it has ennobled with the very nobility of God, and it says to intelligent men and women: Doubt is no argument, doubt is the paralysis of the spiritual being; experience alone brings sufficient demonstration of the reality of religion; life is proof. There never will be a second Christ to atone for the sin of rejecting the first.

And, when the door of hope and the door of affection and the door of reason have been appealed to in vain—when childhood has passed with no other response to the urgency of appeal than this, "Too young to let him in"; when youth has passed, with its thoughtless response, "Time enough to let him in"; when middle age has passed, with its common response, "Too busy to let him in"; when old age with its leaf in the autumn has no wiser response than this, "Hardly worth while to let him in," then the saddest

fate I can imagine for any soul is simply to be left alone, with the bells in the high towers of time finding an echo in eternity; with the spirit grieved away, and the merciful Christ forced away and time passed away.

And the attitude of indecision which I have sought to describe finds ready illustration in every community. One of the saddest confessions I have ever heard was this from the lips of a Christian father: "The greatest mistake of my life was made when I said one day to my minister, 'I will not urge my children to an early decision'; now, not one of five has named Christ's name, and I sit at the communion table alone." And the fact that postponement becomes a settled habit is a well-known fact. A famous evangelist cites the experience of a man who at the age of sixty rose in one of his meetings and said: "Publicly I accept the great offer. I fought through the war, I have been in Andersonville prison, I have honorably amassed wealth, I have been Governor of my State; I have openly and courageously announced my convictions in everything, and, strange to say, in this matter of eternal importance, I have played the coward; henceforth, be it known, 'To me to live is Christ.' " And it was known in a consistent and aggressive Christian life.

II. With the other aspect of truth in the text, the divine Master at the heart-door of a professed disciple and asking for larger room, let us earnestly deal. Laodicea's sin was the sin of a neglected covenant, a

stunted spirituality, a wilful pre-occupation. "Rich and increased with goods," she had let her hand slip out of God's. Her estimate of values was a false estimate. Recently a merchant under spiritual conviction made this remarkable confession: "I have so far pampered the natural man, I have gratified the intellectual man, I have dwarfed the spiritual. Prayer is the breath of the spirit, and I do not know how to pray. Fronting eternity, I am bankrupt." A famous artist represents Christ at the door, crowned with thorns, and weeping as he knocks, and, when there is any settled indifference to his loving appeal, there is some reason to believe that an alien object of affection has usurped the throne-room of the heart; that some passing fellowship has used its enchantment to weaken the central purpose of life and lower its ideals; that some earlier altar of prayer or piety has gone down before rude intrusions from without; and, with any of these things true, fresh pathos comes into the old-time sorrow. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

The green sod of Gethsemane was wet one night with the blood-drops of sacrificial suffering while the disciples slept, and, when in a life of divided devotion we catch some note of apology for a neglect of the things of the soul, neglect of the Day of God, or the Book of God, or the service of God, or communion with God, then, ten to one, the note of apology for neglect has been preceded in the soul by a gradual apostacy, with its mark, "lukewarmness." The im-

pulse of the Absolute is love, and the dishonor of Christ is religion practiced in his name with only half a heart. The glory of the Christian profession is loyalty to Him.

“We do not crown him Lord at all,
Unless we crown him Lord of all.”

In any case the knock of Christ is a personal call to personal privilege.

There is no more beautiful passage in all religious literature than this from the *Te Deum*: “When thou didst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the Kingdom to all believers.” And the power of Christ in this or any age is His spirit re-incarnate in human institution and illustration in human action.

The Christ of fact and faith is far more to your devotion and mine than the reverent thought of an absent but well-remembered friend. As a mysterious, yet real person, he powerfully appeals at this very hour—through the word he appeals, through providences sometimes strange and misunderstood, through conscience, through memory, through sacraments, through prayer. You doubtless recall how Robert Elsmere of Mrs. Ward’s book came at last to be content with the belief that Christianity is merely “local and legendary”; you recall, too, that the spirit of his religion became correspondingly cold and comfortless, with the only Christ left to him, either for the dumb despair of the doubter or the hope of the believer, a dead Christ.

“I am he that liveth and was dead,” is the vital and

vitalizing watchword of Christianity. Eliminate that from the sum of your creed, and you leave it as nerveless as infidelity itself. When a stranger stepped into the cottage of a poor but musical German family and asked the privilege of listening to some of Beethoven's compositions, he was just a stranger; but, when he was granted the privilege of playing, and the poor instrument responded to his master-touch like a sensitive, living soul, he was none other than Beethoven himself. And to make surrender of a whole life to Jesus when He asks for admission, is to feel the magic of His inspirational touch through every force and feeling and faculty of consecrated being, and to have Him become "guest of honor" in an announcement like this, "I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me."

How intensely personal is the fellowship he offers. It is not simply, "I will send doctrine to the doubter," but this, "I will come with the doctrine"; not simply, "I will issue an edict of pardon for the wasted life," but, "I will come with the pardon"; not simply, "I will announce the philosophy of comfort," but, "I will come with the comfort"; not simply, "I will point to the transfigured heights of privilege," but, "I will lead the way." When, on a cold February evening, Dr. Cuyler of Brooklyn stepped from the door of a wealthy New York merchant, saying, "What a terrible, terrible night for the poor," the merchant, handed him a roll of bills and said, "Help the poorest people you know with this." It was help; it was

present help, appreciated help, but it lacked the very truest element of the best help—the personal touch. The merchant had compassion, and sent something; the divine benefactor, who has for the asking the “fine gold” and the “white raiment” and the “eye salve,” comes right down to the doors of a Nazareth, and, with all his largeness of gift, gives himself.

The personal equation is hinted at in this. It is not enough to file away Christ’s overtures as business men file away letters. The earnestness of life is the only passport to the satisfactions of life, and earnestness is not possible without faith. There is a downward movement of all-embracing love, and there must needs be an upward movement of appropriating faith to match it. Just as you have seen a child on the sea-shore dig his little well in the sand and leave a channel through which at high tide the great ocean may creep in to fill it, so the condition of being “filled with all the fullness of God” is—keep open the channels. As Beethoven came in to interpret Beethoven, so Jesus comes in to interpret Jesus in all the sweet music of his acts and attributes, with the harmony of life growing day by day into a climax like this:

“O Jesus, ever with us stay;
Make all our moments calm and bright.”

Faith may be the look of a contrite soul to the Christ crucified, or, in the simple definition of Phillips Brooks, it may announce, “Forsaking all else, I take Him”; but there is nothing more direct than that which is suggested by the figure of the text, admit

him. Several years ago it was reported to me that an avowed agnostic was attending our services with considerable regularity. No one, however, ventured to approach him on matters of religion. On the morning of the day when the text of my sermon happened to be, "Ye are complete in Him," the lawyer came forward to say, with some warmth, "Thank you; I enjoyed it." There was something about his manner which convinced me that he was sick of his incompleteness without Christ. I was constrained to write him a brief letter, expressing my belief that Christ was knocking at a door which was ready to open. The letter followed him to a mining camp, and, two days later, I received a courteous answer, saying, "I appreciate your interest exceedingly, but I fear that your hope is far from realization." In the afternoon of the same day I received a second letter, in which he said: "My first note was simply a bluff; I have been under conviction for months, and will resist no longer. I have risen from my knees a saved man, and, on my return will, at the earliest opportunity, confess it." He did so, and, as he spoke to the Session, in tears, of his hunger of heart through the years, he did not weep alone. On the day of his first communion he said, "Now it must be a whole life," and it was. The knocking Christ became the King of his thought and affection. On the afternoon of that communion day he called me up by telephone to say that his son, a college junior, had made confession. Within a week he purchased the best copy of the Word obtainable in

the city, and asked for a class in the Sabbath School, saying, "I must put in full time now, after years of barrenness." Faithful and devoted, he did "put in full time." Within a year a young man from his class, when asked by the Session what particular influence had led him to a decision, answered, "The earnestness of my teacher." Honored in a church of a thousand members by being elected to the presidency of the Brotherhood, he was a constant witness in the church and the world, until one day he heard from his Master's lips, "Well done" for well-doing. Into the very best room of his being he had admitted Jesus, when he knocked; then Jesus admitted him to the eternal banquet of love.

"Admit Him, for the human breast
Ne'er entertained so kind a guest."

III

FAITH'S PART

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III

FAITH'S PART

“For by grace are ye saved through faith.”—EPHESIANS ii. 8.

SO LONG as a man has faith in a power higher and better than himself he may be “cast down, but not destroyed, persecuted but not forsaken.” So long as he has not such a faith he is the sport of the winds and waves. Faith in anything above yourself helps to lift you up some. But why stop short of the best there is? Why take the imperfect when there is the perfect? And so we ask you now to think about that faith which finds the divine heart in the God-man, Christ Jesus, and love divine in His cross. The word “give” you find constantly connected with the name of God. The two seem to be so much together that you get to expect the one where you find the other. Before Paul’s conversion he boasted of what he did for God, afterwards he talked mainly of what God gave him. Until man has the right kind of faith in God he cannot establish the sort of relation to Him that He wants in order that He may give us of His grace. So important is this that it is even said, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” That seems strange to many, but the main point is, He has something to give that is absolutely necessary for us to have, and we can’t have it until we are in a state

of mind to receive. The right sort of faith makes a man a good receptacle. What we all need practically is to realize that we each have a great capacity for God, and when that capacity is filled we are very different creatures from what we are when it is empty. And your faith in God is the measure of your capacity for Him. So we may well keep on praying the old cry, "Lord increase my faith." Let us focus our thoughts for a little while on this word faith until we see clearly some of its infinite values to our souls.

I. The text emphasizes its great leading part. Faith saves. At least, it says that it is what enables divine grace to save, which makes our first saying true. We cannot talk about one very well without the other. Did you ever try to picture grace and faith as two persons looking at one another? Grace must always be looking down. Faith looks up. The Greek thought of the curve that the sun makes in bending down from the height to the earth as the line of Grace. That is the difference between the beauty of grace and any other kind of beauty. It is the beauty of bending down and touching the poor earth. Grace is what the superior feels to the one below. The king can show grace to a subject. A parent can have grace to a child. An educated man can show grace to the untaught. They can bend over them and stoop to touch and give. This gives us a little chance to imagine what the grace of God is. It is His bending to us. The true line of beauty is the curve of descent by which Divine love came down from the heavens and touched the earth in

the manger of Bethlehem. Every time Jesus stooped to a poor sufferer or sinner there was the curve of grace. Now the only thing with which we poor creatures can face God's grace, looking down and stooping, is our faith looking up. What a meeting that is when the eyes of grace and of faith meet and when the hand of grace reaching down feels the hand of faith reaching up to clasp it. Here we have the Gospel in a picture and it is so perfectly simple and true. Isn't it so in the heart of each one of us as we think of all our unrest and longings and strivings for better things? Isn't it our hand of imperfect faith reaching out into the darkness and isn't it so that in that darkness something has clasped that hand. It is the grace of God reaching down and the two just meet. You may be perfectly sure Grace will never cease looking down so long as there is one hand to reach upward out of the dark, or one human voice to sing through tears,

"My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary."

There is one thing you need never worry over, and that is as to which direction the love on Calvary is looking. For Grace is always looking down. Your only concern is whether you can truly sing or cry, "My faith looks up." The downward grace and the upward faith, these two wonderful things meeting. One human, the other divine. And oh, how lonely and sad one of these is without the other.

The Bible, you remember, says that there was a time when men were lonely and miserably and lost

and they turned their eyes around and up, and other men couldn't help them, and their false gods couldn't, and it is written there was "no eye to pity and no arm to save." That is, there was the upward reach of the human soul but no downward reach of grace, apparently. Then it is written again, "Then the Lord had pity and His right arm was seen reaching down." And those two met at last. God bent down and man raised the feeble hand of faith. Then when they clasped there was a great and joyful salvation. God and man were together. Grace saved, but it was through faith. So Faith saves.

But it would be equally sad if when grace stoops down there are none to look up to it and join hands with it. And yet is not that happening every day with us. May it not be at this very moment that into your soul and mind the grace of God is looking and bending low and that down-reach of heaven into the darkness and sorrow or sins of our lives is unmet by any grateful up-look from us. You recall what one testified in the Psalms, "They looked unto Him and were lightened and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him." Is that not a fine example of what happens when a man does take the up-look of faith. His face is lightened because the face of God's love is looking down and into that upturned face and, like Moses, his own face may reflect that brightness, though he knows it not. How many times in our lives do you suppose it possible that there has been the down-reach of Divine Grace

to our lives trying to get us to make the up-reach of faith, to join hands with it in deathless union and so be lifted up and saved?

And we have kept on looking everywhere but upward to the light and glory over our heads. That is what faith does. It is the up-reach of a human soul that meets the glory and the grace of God coming down, and that is salvation. Look up! Men get round shouldered walking in the ravines and gullies of the hills looking for sands of gold. Even the children in some places are put early to the grind and get what they call in the Tyrol, "the stoop," from being weighed down with their faces to the ground under the load they carry. Oh, friends, there are a great many people who get round shouldered and get the stoop under the load of sin and care and sorrow they strap to their backs, or by the things they fix their gaze on and search for, leaving the true gold of life to go unsought.

II. But let us not forget that, while we may say faith saves, the moment it feels itself held in the warm hand of Divine Grace, there are certain very definite things that it keeps on doing, which we ought to think about, also, if we would do justice to Faith's part. One of them is, Faith enriches because it connects you with the treasures of grace. You know when a noble ship is wrecked upon some reef there may not be so complete a loss but that some little remnant of its once rich cargo may be secured for what they call salvage. When you think of what ship a soul is when it

is launched on the seas of life, carrying infinite treasure and booked for a celestial port, and when that ship gets out of the way and goes to pieces before it arrives, there may be a little rescued out of the wreck which men call pleasure or success or honor, but after all at the very best it is only salvage. It is the little fraction, but it isn't like coming into port with sails set, with cargo safe, with a welcome home and the joy of conquest. Faith that joins a man's life with God's gets more than salvage. It carries a cargo. Faith puts into life all the riches that belong to it. Think what a lack of that un-reaching faith cuts a man off from. Think of the things he forfeits, and when you see what an infinite difference there is in those two conditions you will find it hard to believe that one who can be so rich, who can be so great and strong and happy, is in the line of reason and intelligence when he deliberately cuts himself off from possessing faith's riches and makes himself as poor as a man is who is only getting some unimportant salvage out of a wreck.

I think of an article I read the other day by a great man and once a man of faith, who gave it all up and wrote this article admitting that it was a terrible sacrifice to lose the things of faith, but that on the other hand you got other things, and he tried to show what comforts and pleasures might be had without hope of heaven or union with God. A very pitiful showing! It was like seeing a great ship go forth laden with merchandise and then getting a wire: "Ship went to pieces on the Lizard; all lost but chain and anchor,

with hope of saving the windlass and the parrot." A little out of the wreckage, that is all you get out of life when you cut off the treasures that go with faith.

To change the figure, faith stocks life with valuable contents. It annexes empire. It discovers new territory. When Romanes gave up faith for awhile at the dictates of imaginary necessity, he found, as he said, that life was robbed of its principle contents and science was spending its time over really secondary interests of life. He came back to faith to get back his kingdom. That is what Heine did in Germany. He went out and he came back saying, "I am homesick." That was how the Prodigal found it. It is always "the far country and husks" with a man when he gets out of the relation that faith establishes with grace. It isn't reasonable to believe that one who is so fitted to make himself at home among the things that faith brings in, doesn't belong there as a birth-right. Think of what faith adds which you can't have without it. Christian faith, I mean, that believes the story of the love of God to men as shown through Jesus Christ. What does it add to your life and mine to think of ourselves as the object of such transcendent fatherly affection, as the subject of such a magnificent plan of redemption, as the children of such a God, as the friends of such a Christ? As being thought worthy of such a sacrifice? As being of such value in the sight of heaven as to justify any ransom price? Do you wonder such a faith as that, which lays hold on such gigantic truth as that, ennobles men who rise

to it, who feel its majesty reverberating through their souls, expanding their very intellects in the attempts to grasp the largeness of the thoughts it carries, expanding the heart in its effort to hold all the beauty and love and joy of it? Do you wonder it made those Gallilean fishermen seem so great? Men speak of Paul as being very intellectual, but I believe that it was his efforts to grasp the Gospel and hold the things that faith brought into his life that will account for what looks like human superiority. I believe his faith built his brain up a great deal more than his brain built his faith up.

And so it is with all those men once so simple but later so great. Faith builds up eternal relations for you. You come into your own. Didn't Jesus say, "I give unto you a Kingdom." That is just it. One who can say God is my friend, who can say I believe all Paul believed in the epistle to the Romans, has found a kingdom. One who can say I appropriate all that Jesus ever said and did and promised, is a very rich man indeed. Read all that the Gospel says belongs to a man who believes, and then think how much you may have to take home with you today to be yours in life and death. Tell me if you or any one else has anything they call their own which they didn't get by faith which they won't some day part with. Is such a life rich or poor?

III. There is one part which faith plays for us that is not often enough thought of and that is, it protects from so many many substitutes for faith. If there

were no other reason for laying hold on the great and glorious faith that the Gospel asks us to believe in, it would be worth while just to escape from believing what we should have to if we had not this faith. Think of having to believe in a God who sees us in our troubles and struggles and miseries of all sorts and never made a direct revelation of Himself to us. Who never sent us a direct message. Who never showed Himself on earth in any shape. Who never sent us a clear, definite, authoritative revelation of what He Himself is and what He has in mind for us. And yet you have to believe in such an unnatural and unlikely and unreasonable thing as that is if the up-reach of your faith doesn't meet the down-reach of His grace. Do you really want to believe that you are your own savior? That it is what you do for God instead of what He does for you that lies at the bottom of your hopes? You know your fight, how hard it is. You know what the fight of others has been. You know the world and what it means to overcome it. Faith in Christ protects you from having to believe that the power at the bottom of your life is only what you see in and around you. Faith in the Divine Christ protects you from having to read the most wondrous story ever conceived, the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and having to believe that He was mistaken, or deceived, or a false guide, or invented in the common mind of His followers, or has been misunderstood or misreported by those who lived with Him day by day and who gave up everything,

even life itself, to be His disciples. You have to abuse your minds by believing one of these astonishing things, unless you have the sweet faith that Jesus is the Son of Glory come down from heaven to bring love down, to suffer just as perfect love always wants to do. It is impossible to believe that any other thought so sublime and beautiful could ever be offered to our minds to receive as what Paul calls "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." It honors our God by showing Him at work as if he had perfect love and perfect power. It honors you and me by showing what we are heirs to, by showing that the poorest and vilest is yet capable of throwing off evil and some day sitting at the right hand of God. It shows that the greatest thing love can do has been done to set a value on us. In what Divine Grace does in our Gospel we see a perfect God. In what we see about ourselves there we see the best that can be hoped for our sinful race. It is the simplest, sweetest, grandest thing that can be told to a sinner. Now, if you don't believe in that, you must believe in something far short of that. Don't we want to be protected from believing in the second best or the third best? One man who used to believe that he was a child of the covenant through God's grace gave it up and believed for a time in nothing. After that he began to believe in dreams, and on the strength of a dream sold his property to dig for supposed treasure at a great depth under his house, and suicided over his disappointment. This is an extreme case, but, friends, it is true that the multi-

tudes today who have no faith in the Gospel which exalts the Fatherhood of God in its transcendent mercy and in the divine destiny of men through the cross on which that love was sacrificed, are believing things which, in comparison with that Gospel, are as dreams that end in self-destruction. The things men have to believe in to escape believing "that God so loved the world that He gave His son"—have you reckoned them up? Have you thought of how thankful you ought to be that your parents didn't bring you up to read your life down into the dirt and the grave rather than up into the light and above the stars? You and I see every day those who are believing in things that are at most only second best, that fall short of the glory and majesty that circle about the cross of redeeming love in its stupendous offering for sin. You see men who turn away from the Scriptures, unread or scorned, to read pages that at best are but twilight to sunlight in comparison. You find men who believe, or say they do, that this wonderful being man, with his marvelous nature that aspires and loves and thinks thoughts that reach out to the infinite, is but a fading leaf or a falling star, so soon ended. There are those who believe that the cherished and exquisite graces of the purest souls are but the motions or stirrings of phosphorus. My friends, mark our text again. By grace are we saved by faith from putting your reason to such an employ as to level your lives to such a degradation. When we behold what a wreck men make in their thinking over this fair uni-

verse of God and over the magnificent mysteries of human life, and what slanderous interpretations they can put on the things in our life that make up its sacred charm and only real value, do we not feel that we must cling oh, so hard, to the faith that reads life upward into the sublimities that we may be protected from a faith that chains us to the dirt and a creed that faces the everlasting darkness. Go home and gather your children up into your arms today and think what a privilege it is to tell them of the meaning of their life as a believer in Jesus Christ. Go to your sick friend and rejoice in what you feel you can tell him for his cheer simply as a simple believer. Go to the fallen acquaintance and think of what you are commissioned to tell him on the strength of what you believe of infinite mercy. Go to your work or care or sorrow, and rejoice in the things that you can carry in your heart to make them sublime in their meaning and result through your faith in God's love made known. Be thankful that you are spared by your pure faith from having to go to these places and meet these people with some substitute in your hearts for what you get from Jesus Christ. Oh, what things we are protected from believing and from having to tell others by just having the sweet, rational, saving story of the perfect love, the glorious hope stored away in our souls, and if we haven't that protection we can begin to have it today.

IV. There is, too, a little we wanted to say about a fourth part which faith plays in our life if we will

let it. It interprets. It explains. It answers questions which we cannot get answered anywhere else. There are not many things we need to know, but we do feel we have a right to know some things. We do want to know whether it is worth while to hold out against evil, and whether we have to live under blind fate, or whether love is at the helm. We do want to know if there is any such thing as an intelligent plan running through our tangled lives. We do want to know if sorrow has any lessons to impart, or only sufferings. We do want to know what we are in the world for, and what we have to reckon on for a backing. We see hosts of people getting discouraged and soured and embittered, and we are a little inclined that way ourselves. We see many who are giving up resistance to the things they used to resist of the currents of evil in the world. We feel the drawing of the current ourselves, and yet we here are not quite satisfied that such is the course of rational beings. As the famous slave, Epictetus, said once: "If I were a swan, I should just plan a swan's life. If an eagle, I should lay life out as such. If I were a sheep, I should plan life on that scale, but, being a rational being, I must plan my life as such, and ask what is it intelligent for me to do?" Dear fellow-strugglers, it is faith that gives us the intelligent life and helps us live it. It gives an intelligent explanation of that we call sin and its remedy. It gives an intelligent explanation of what is to be the end of all this old conflict and suffering that we are going through. Here is the

key that opens the door of every dark chamber and closet in a man's life and throws the light of day into it. We have left God out and we don't understand things. We have forgotten eternity and things look mixed up and purposeless. We have forgotten the soul and so we cannot see the value of those hard blows that have been battering our pride and ambition and ease of heart. We have ignored the cross of Christ, the center of all things human, and so we have not realized the power of the sins that are sweeping us away from virtue and what power it will require to bring us back. But faith explains. It sees the eternal purpose, the far-off goal to which love is trying to advance us. It shows what things are first. It has an answer to the mourner's tears and the sinner's cry for help. It discovers the values that lie in the meanest lives. What shall we then do about faith? That to have it is best, we all agree. That we want it, we all consent. That life is imperfect and empty without it, perhaps no one here denies. That it is so simple and reasonable and so exactly suited to our case that we cannot keep back from it, may God grant we may all say now: Faith is the sincere up-reach of our hearts lifting up their real needs to the only real source of help. If there is such an upward stretching of your soul toward your God today, believe that it is the noblest, truest, deepest and most important demand of your very soul that is tugging to reach and touch again the love that created it and is calling to it from out the depths of the eternities. That upward reach

of the soul is not of your own making, for the other part of our text-verse says, "It is the gift of God." Every longing for the truth and for purity and holiness, every hunger-pang for things beyond the visible and the temporal, are his gift. It is for us to follow these noble hints within our sin-sick souls and not crush them out. Be still a moment and look within. Is not the whole drift of our poor hearts just now running like a torrent upward toward the Father of us all and to the Savior who stoops to us with mercy. It is your human faith trying to lift its hand. The desire itself that struggles in us is itself not created by you. It is what separation from God and the destructiveness of sin even has not been able to destroy. It is the gift of God; put there when He made us in His image and now kindled into flame by the Holy Spirit. It is the story of a homesick child. Now let us be true to our best thought and our purest desire. Let the hand of grace now take our hand of trembling faith uplifted.

IV

ALMOST PERSUADED

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IV

ALMOST PERSUADED

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—ACTS xxvi. 28.

THE Apostle Paul, again a prisoner, appears on trial and is called upon to vindicate himself against the charges of the enemy. He now appears before the highest representative of Cæsar upon the one hand, and the highest representative of the Jewish tribunal on the other. Festus, the Roman Governor, has already examined him and as he can find no fault in him, he summons Agrippa to hear his case. Now the Apostle was very much pleased with this arrangement because Agrippa, being a Jew, would have a knowledge of Old Testament prophecy and upon this very argument the prisoner was about to base his plea. He therefore begins with an expression of satisfaction: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, that I am called upon this day to answer before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused; especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently." The Apostle then goes on to give an account of the manner of his life from his youth up. How he had been raised after the straightest sect a Pharisee and how he had done many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostle then

gives an account of his conversion, and how afterwards he had gone through all the coasts of Judea and Galilee, declaring no other doctrine than Moses and the prophets did say should come to pass; that Christ should suffer and that he should be the first to show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

Paul would now inquire of Agrippa if he did indeed believe in the prophecies of the Old Testament. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." The Apostle's learned argument, his convincing logic, his powerful appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures had such an affect upon the mind and understanding of Agrippa that he could not conceal his conviction and he replies in the words of the text (authorized version), "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

We have here an example of how men will reject what they admit to be truth, trifle with eternal interests and commit the prize of heaven to that most uncertain of all lotteries—the future.

I will try to bring out the meaning by calling attention to the important words of the text: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a *Christian*." A *Christian*. Behold, there is reality in our blessed religion. Scene: the King on his throne. Audience: the critical Greek, and the hypocritical Jew. Object: a prisoner to defend his Christianity. There he stands, chained to the soldier who guards him, so ably defending his position, that instead of bringing condemnation on his own head, he wins the judge to his side of the case and by

force of logic compels him to admit the verity of the Christian faith. This was a noble tribute to the truth of the Christian religion. To be a Christian it would be necessary for Agrippa to believe in the life, death, sufferings and resurrection of Jesus; also to acknowledge Him as his personal Savior. This would bring upon the king odium, ridicule, persecution, and, in all probability, death itself. For these were days when it tried men's souls to be Christians. But in spite of his former belief and in the presence of malignant enemies of the truth, Agrippa on his throne is captured, defeated, conquered, by the prisoner in chains and is about to become a Christian.

How many of us would be found on the Lord's side if it were still the unpopular one. Can it be that any here are not willing to announce themselves as Christians, although such announcement would involve neither odium, ridicule nor personal danger, but on the other hand assure the highest good in this life and a blessed immortality beyond the grave?

But what means did the Apostle make use of to convince the king? He *persuaded* him—"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Although a captive in chains, who might have been justly incensed at treatment so cruel, yet Paul does not abuse his accusers, but only intent upon the one thing needful and far more concerned about that than all else, would persuade his enemies to be Christians. Well might the believer die with a shout of satisfaction if he has fully persuaded only one soul to be a

Christian. He who leads another into saving relation with Jesus Christ will be better off up yonder than could be the possessor of a million worlds. Who then can tell of the reward of the faithful Sunday school teacher who shall stand before the White Throne with the whole class won to Jesus? Who then can estimate the reward of those faithful parents who shall stand in the judgment and say: "Here, Lord, are we, and all the children that Thou gavest us"? Who then can describe the hallowed glory of Paul now, though bound in chains and fettered in bonds so often here on earth? Chain down his immortal spirit? Ah no; long since, free as air, it has winged its way on the ever brightening path of immortality. Here we find him persuading Agrippa that Jesus is He of whom the prophets spake, the very Christ indeed.

Do I address any today who are not yet persuaded to be Christians? And why are you not? Do you believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? You do. Do you believe the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah have been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth? You do. Do you believe that Jesus, the divine Son of God, died for sinners? You do. Do you believe there is no other Savior? You do. Do you believe that you must die and that you will need a Savior then? You do. Do you believe that you must be judged for the deeds done in the body and that you will need an advocate before God, the Father? You do. Do you believe you ought to be a Christian? You do. Then why will you not be a Christian? Will

you reject the Christian religion when you feel that you need the Christian religion? Will you turn away from the Son of God when you know that there is no other way of Salvation? Is it wise to refrain from doing that which duty, conscience, reason, the Bible, all tell you you ought to do?

I am now appealing to the reason and common sense of every one that is not a Christian. Remember, before Paul made this plea to Agrippa the latter did not believe in the New Testament doctrine at all; but before the Apostle had finished his argument the king was convinced that the doctrine of Paul was the true doctrine, and his only mistake was in putting off its acceptance until some time in the future. But most, if not all of you, have all along believed in the life, death, sufferings and resurrection of Jesus. Ever since you were old enough to walk up and down these familiar church aisles, you have known the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

Again I ask, why are not you a Christian? Numerous reasons might be urged that ought to be sufficient to persuade any one. Many of you are young. You stand now on the threshold of life and look down the dim vista of the future, and picture to yourselves on the canvas of immortality the reward of a long and well-spent life. I assure you if it is the highest good here, and Heaven in eternity that you seek, these things can only be found in the service of our divine Lord and Master. Besides, there is something that is pleasing to Almighty God in one's young life wholly

dedicated to him. As a sweet smelling savor the odor of your sacrifice rises to the skies as you give yourself to the supreme mission of ministering in his courts and of winning souls.

Furthermore, life is uncertain; the young may die. In my first pastorate God gave us a gracious revival of religion. During the meetings, one evening in the preparatory service, a young lady asked me to speak to her brother. She said: "My brother is here tonight. We sent for him to come home. Tomorrow he must go back to work. This is the only meeting he can attend. We are very anxious that he confess Christ tonight and unite with the church. Won't you please speak to him before you preach and ask him to meet with the Session and make profession of faith before he leaves the meeting tonight?"

That sister is in Heaven now, where all the sisters shall eternally dwell who try to bring their brothers into the Kingdom. I did not see how I could get to the young man. The church was crowded and he was at the end of a seat next the wall. Besides, I was timid and without experience in personal work; but I could not refuse that sister's request and during the singing of a hymn I found my way to the young man. I gave him his sister's message, and he said: "I am not ready; I have not been thinking about making a profession of religion. I must have time to consider this question." I said: "This is the only meeting you can attend; tomorrow you leave to return to work. God is as able to save you tonight as he ever will be. Now is the

accepted time." He answered that he would think about it during the service. After the sermon, when the invitation was given, this young man was the first to respond and come forward publicly to acknowledge Christ as his Savior. The meetings closed, and in a few weeks, side by side, we laid that brother and sister down beneath the green sod in the quiet village church yard, but their glorified spirits had gone home to Heaven, for they were God's children.

Young man, where is the lease you have on your life? Do you have it with you tonight? Do you have it at home in your trunk? If you have, produce it and act accordingly. But you do not have it; you know you do not. This night you may be in eternity. "In such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh." There is nothing but the brittle thread of life between you and the grave. That thread may snap at any moment and you will be in the presence of your God. I plead with you, young people, by the uncertainty of life, by the youth that God has given you, by your opportunities for usefulness, by the seal of the divinity upon you, be altogether persuaded tonight.

You may be a father or mother with a family of children growing up around you, but for some reason you have not yet become a Christian. What led you to reject the Christian religion, I know not. God has greatly blessed you in the children He has given you. Will you look far enough into the future to see them lost because of your example. You can scarcely expect your children to be Christians if you are not. Besides,

it would be a very difficult matter for them to live the Christian life if the Bible is not opened in their home and the Scriptures read and prayer offered. It is a hard thing for the children of an ungodly home to be Christians. They may go to Sabbath school and to church on the Lord's day, but how can they live right all through the week in a Christless home.

A minister whom I well know, was anxious for the salvation of a young man in whom he was deeply interested. The pastor went to this boy and said: "This would be a good time for you to become a Christian. A great many young people are now coming out on the Lord's side. This will be helpful to you and you ought not longer to delay." The young man answered his pastor: "You go talk to my father. If you can get him to be a Christian, I will, too, but it is of no use for me to try to do what is right if my father will not be a better man." The pastor went at once to that father and told him just what his son had said, but the father would not yield, and did not, and thereby assumed a responsibility sufficient to make the very devils tremble.

Oh, you fathers, by the children that play around your hearthstone, by the obligation you owe them as priest of your house, by your hope of family reunion in heaven, I plead with you to get right with God this hour.

You may be old now; your children have left you, and you cannot kneel with them at the family altar; but you can still hold them in remembrance at the

Throne of Grace, and that is much. These are the prayers that go after the boys and girls and follow them out to the distant territories and across the rolling seas, and sometime, somewhere, shall bring them down upon their knees before their father's God.

Can it be that any of you old people are not living the Christian life? That you have not prayed for yourselves since you were little children at your mother's knee? The reaper Death has only a few more rounds to make when it will inevitably reach you? The young may live; the old must die. By that opening grave, by that making shroud, by those tottering steps, by yonder dawning eternity, I implore you, do not longer delay to be a Christian. I do not say you may not. I say you will not hear many more pleas, and your last sickness may be so full of pain and fever that you cannot make preparation then. "Men and brethren, believeth thou the prophets? I know that thou believeth."

In the 16th chapter of the Gospel by Luke, it is clearly revealed that there is a place of everlasting punishment and a place of everlasting glory. We have also all the evidence we need to induce us to try to escape from the one and to reach the other. We have the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We have Moses and the prophets. We have the Gospel of the Son of God. We have faithful ministers of the Word. We have all the ordinances of God's House. If these things be not sufficient to persuade us, then, though one should rise from the dead and tell here in

these earthly courts of the joys of heaven or the pains of hell, we would be unpersuaded still.

But I fear it is with some of us as it was with Agrippa--*almost*. "*Almost* thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The word here translated "*almost*" means, briefly, in a short space of time. This meaning is brought out in the revised version, but the indecision that was in the mind of Agrippa is no doubt well expressed in the word "*almost*." Paul insists, Festus scoffs, and Agrippa can do nothing else than protest against being driven into an admission of the Christian system by so brief an argument, or in such a short period of time; and, just at this point, where he ought to have yielded his heart in obedience, he dismisses the whole matter by being "*almost* persuaded." We have no account that he was ever saved. No doubt he was nearer Heaven just at that moment, when "*almost* persuaded," than ever again.

Well, if you are almost persuaded, you are far on in the Christian way. Your mind is convinced; the need of a Savior is felt. The Scriptures are received as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. You assent intellectually to the doctrines of the New Testament. Only one more step is necessary. See! The pearly gates swing open. You are just about to enter in. Prepare another robe, another harp, another crown. Ah, poor soul, you stop when almost saved; quick as the rapid flight of years, the pearly gates swing back and from the very threshold of immortal glory, you slip away into the blackness of darkness

forever. Oh, to be almost within reach of all the blood-bought glories of the heavenly kingdom and then to lose them all by stopping at "almost." To be almost saved is to be altogether lost. If a ship is almost saved at sea, it is not saved at all. If a house is almost saved from burning, it is not saved at all. If a man is almost saved from drowning, he is not saved at all. If a sinner is almost saved from his sins, he is not saved at all. Are you satisfied to be almost saved?

"Almost persuaded, come, come today;
Almost persuaded, turn not away;
Jesus invites you here,
Angels are lingering near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear;
Oh wanderer come."

"Almost persuaded, harvest is past!
Almost persuaded, doom comes at last!
Almost cannot avail;
Almost is but to fail.
Sad, sad that bitter wail,
Almost—but lost!"

A few years ago, when I was pastor in Newton, Kansas, a terrible blizzard swept over the little city. The cold was intense. The wind blew in a hurricane, lifting the sand from the streets and driving it and the sleet with such fury that no human being could long face the storm. One poor fellow was caught when almost home. The faithful horses that he was driving knew the road and kept right on. The man, to keep from freezing in the wagon, put the lines around his neck and got out to walk. At last he was in sight of home. Through the window he could

almost see the fire blazing on his own hearthstone; then before the raging fury of the storm, he wavered and stumbled and fell. The horses reached the barn and shelter. A rescue party found their driver dead in the snow and sand. Almost home—but lost.

Multitudes have been nearer our Father's house than that, and then have slipped away from the very portals. Almost saved, but lost! Lost! Man, woman, you are standing at the threshold now. Only another step, and will you not take it? Only a word and will you not speak it? Only the uplifted hand by faith and will you not raise it? The everlasting gates are opening. Loved ones are beckoning. God is calling. Press on. You are almost home. Pray that it may be *altogether*. My hearer, this is the Gospel message. I leave it with you. You, yourself, I leave with your conscience and your God.

V

A MODEL PREACHER AND A
GREAT SERMON

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V

A MODEL PREACHER AND A GREAT SERMON

“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come Felix trembled.”—ACTS xxiv. 25.

WE have seen St. Paul under very many different conditions as we have carefully studied the story of his life. We have found him as the persecutor consenting to the death of St. Stephen, and later we have seen him, with flashing eye and determined spirit, setting his face toward Damascus, that he might persecute the Christians, men, women and children, even unto strange cities. Then, suddenly, all is changed, and he is himself a Christian, and, as such, we have seen him beaten with stripes; stoned with stones; left by the wayside for dead; tossed upon the sea in a storm; cast upon an island as a result of shipwreck, and, at the end of his great career, we see him walking to his death like a conqueror. Rome never knew a more heroic soul than St. Paul, the Apostle. We have listened to him preaching on different occasions, and, with the exception of his Master, there never was such a preacher.

We studied him upon Mars Hill, as he was delivering his mighty message, and when he had gathered a great crowd around him, we were thrilled, as he said: “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld

your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, *To the Unknown God*. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts xvii, 22-23.)

But here in this text is an illustration of another sort. This is a picture of a private ministry, with an audience of two. It is a testing service, for it is vastly easier to speak upon Mars Hill, when he faces a crowd, than to stand in the presence of two important people, and rebuke them because of their sin. It is easy to be brave when surrounded by a multitude; not so easy under circumstance like these; but he never flinched. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." (Acts xxiv. 25.) This is the illustrious trio which faces us in this story. It is light and darkness, righteousness and sin facing each other.

The preacher is great. He had well-nigh graduated at the school of suffering. He had grown old before his time. His back was bent; his body was worn, and he said himself that in his body he bore about the very marks of the Lord Jesus. His had been a life of extreme loneliness. Even Jesus had His Bethany, but Paul, denied his Bethany, seemed even more lonely than his Master.

"Yet without cheer of sister or of daughter,
Yet without stay of Father or of Son;
Lone on the land and homeless on the water,
Pass I in patience till the work is done."

Here stands St. Paul, a prisoner, well-nigh a slave;

“a word and he will be thrown to the lions, a nod and the fire will consume him. He is face to face with evil, and he smites it with both hands.” Yet, as Joseph Parker said, he feels the breath upon him of more than twelve legions of angels, and therefore is well-nigh perfect in his display of courage.

The Audience.—The audience is interesting. St. Paul had fought with the beasts at Ephesus, but that struggle was nothing to this. There was Felix, a Roman Procurator, originally a slave, but now free; he had risen to almost unlimited power. A more contemptible person never combined the power of a king and the meanness of a slave. He was a cruel, licentious and unrighteous man. He was steeped in blood, rich by oppression, and profligate in conduct.

Then there was Drusilla. She was said to be one of the beauties of the day. She was the daughter of one king and the wife of another. According to Josephus, she was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First, and she was at one time the wife of the king of Emesa. Felix had enticed her away from her rightful husband by the power of a magician. As a result of this unholy marriage there was born a son, Agrippa, and it is said that he and his miserable mother perished in one of the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius.

The Preacher.—Here is his description of himself. Speaking of others, he said: “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool.) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times

received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and day I have been in the deep; in journeying often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." And he pathetically adds: "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (2 Corinthians xi. 23-28.)

I see him stand in the presence of his audience of two. There is power in his attitude. His eyes are flashing; his lips are trembling; his body quivering with excitement. There is a solemn and death-like hush comes over his auditors, "and as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled."

His Manner.—His manner of preaching is worthy of notice. *He reasoned.* It was perfectly natural for him to do so, for he understood the art perfectly. He was a born logician, but his natural powers are set on fire of God. Let it always be remembered that our religion has ever stood the test of reason. The world's greatest men have been Christians. The greatest philosophers have bowed the knee to Jesus. Men like Bacon, Locke, Johnson, Edwards, Hopkins and McCosh; and it was Locke who said: "If I had my life to

live over I would spend it studying the Epistles of St. Paul and the Psalms." The greatest astronomers have been Christians. Men like Kepler and Newton and a host of others; and it was Newton who said: "I am thinking the thoughts of God, and God is passing before me in all the grandeur of His ways." The greatest scientists, historians, discoverers and statesmen have been devout Christians. So Paul was moving in the right line as he reasoned. The field before him was positively boundless.

His Message.—He reasoned of righteousness. That is the divine ideal of a human life. It is what we ought to be to God and man according to God's teaching. What a rebuke it was to Felix. The woman by his side was an evidence of his sin; as they both leaned forward he could feel her hot breath upon his cheek. He had, in his sin against society, struck a blow at home life in all ages. No wonder he trembled. His position was not much like that of General Wardwell, the hero of two wars, whose story has recently appeared in the public press. His aged wife was discovered to be a leper, and was about to be deported to the lepers' island, when the old General said: "But I, too, am a leper and I must go with her." And they told him, after examination, that he was not a leper and could not go. Then, although her body was wasted by disease, her hands were bent and crippled, her face was marred as a result of her suffering, and her reason dethroned, he took her in his arms and stroked her hair, as he did when she was a bride, cov-

ered her face with his kisses, as when she was his sweetheart, and he said: "You may take her away, but I will if necessary go upon my hands and knees to find her." St. Paul may have presented an ideal like this, and, if he did, I know why Felix trembled.

He was not alone rebuked. Drusilla must have trembled, too. And are we doing our best? Are we not guilty of sins against society, sins against the Church, and sins against the minister, and sins against God? Have we not been guilty of sinning against our fellow-men, of hurting the poor, neglecting the oppressed, forgetting the sorrowing and neglecting the sick? Have not some of us sinned against our households? I heard William A. Sunday recently tell the story of a father who took his little boy into one of the parks in the South. Interested in his newspaper, he dozed, and fell asleep after awhile; his little boy wandered too near the river that ran through the park, when suddenly the father was startled by the cry of his boy, shouting, "Hurry, papa." The father was instantly aroused, only, to his horror, to see that a great crocodile had caught his little fellow as he waded to the river. "Hurry, papa," he shouted; "Hurry." But the father sprang to the river's edge only in time to see his child sink beneath the waves. Vice is on every hand. Sin faces our children everywhere. Pitfalls are at their feet. Hell yawns before them, and I think I hear them shouting, hurry, hurry. If we have failed here we ought to tremble.

St. Paul also reasoned of temperance. That has to

do with one's personal responsibility, for one's own body and the shaping of human relationships. It is the control of the appetites and passions. If there is a distinction between righteousness and temperance, the one is a warning concerning sins against ourselves. Righteousness rebuked Felix for his sin against Drusilla. Temperance rebuked him because of his sin against himself. I can see his face flush and grow pale and his eyes flash with anger. He knew he was wrong and yet he is not alone in that conclusion. Is your life right in the sight of God? You must answer the question to God and not to men; and yet who of us can control himself? Our effort would be an utter failure if we tried. I heard Prof. C. M. Coburn say this summer that Julian Hawthorne in his travels abroad journeyed through Wales. He was accompanied by a Harvard student, who had a periodical passion for drink. One day they were standing together watching the women of Wales with their little children gathering the herbs at the foot of a great cliff. They filled the baskets with these herbs, and the fathers, away up at the top of the cliff, by means of a rope, would draw the baskets up. Suddenly, as they watched, the Harvard student said: "Mr. Hawthorne, the passion for drink is on me again"; when his friend, noting a narrow pathway running almost up the face of the cliff, said: "Run up that quickly, and you will forget it." When he had gotten fairly started, a little girl, noting him, started after him, when she stumbled and fell, and,

fortunately, fell into one of the baskets. The father, feeling the tug upon the rope, thought it filled and started to draw the basket up. The child became frightened, and as the basket was drawn up rapidly, attempted to climb out. It would have been sure death. Julian Hawthorne, with his hands to his mouth, shouted to his friend: "Spring out and catch the rope. Let yourself down. Save the child." The trained athlete balanced himself a moment and sprang out, let himself down, hand by hand, and saved the child. And Julian Hawthorne said the passion for drink never returned to him. Prof. Coburn said it was because of the great principle of sacrifice getting into his life. I can quite understand it, but I can understand this, too, that if one should admit into his life Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, and an abiding strength and hope and comfort, then passion could be controlled, weakness be overcome and deliverance be sure.

He also Reasoned of Judgment to Come.—*The judgment* is a solemn day. It is a place where men meet their past, where books are opened, where conscience and remorse smite the sinner. I was recently in New York, and from the pen of Dorothy Dix in one of the daily papers, I read the following: "Last week a woman in Newark killed herself and her eleven-days-old twins because of remorse. She had sinned the unpardonable sin against her husband and home, and she offered up a triple sacrifice of herself and her babies in expiation of her wrong-doing." No one had

suspected her of being unfaithful to her marriage vows. She was perfectly safe in the trust of her husband, who welcomed the children as his own; but conscience tortured the guilty woman until it drove her insane. She had come to believe, with brooding over the subject, that God would set some seal upon her unborn babe to proclaim her sin to the world, and her first question to the nurse after the twins were born was to know if they were marked in any way. When informed that they were normal, she asked if they would live, and when told that they were healthy and strong, she burst into tears and wept that they should live. Surely, one can imagine no sadder spectacle than that—a mother weeping because her babes would not die. Eleven days later she drowned the helpless innocents in a tub of water, and then slew herself, leaving a piteous letter in which she told how she had committed this mad deed because of remorse that would not let her rest, day or night. Perhaps there was never a more vivid illustration presented of the effects of the dual code of morals for men and women than is given by this tragedy. The wife, who had secretly been disloyal to her husband, was so crushed by the knowledge of her transgression that she took her own life, but no one had ever heard of a man taking his life under the same circumstances. Man's conscience hurts him not. On the contrary, he takes a drink to celebrate what an irresistible charmer he is among women, and only hopes his wife won't find it out for fear of the scene she will make. He isn't crushed to

the earth by any overpowering sense of shame and wrong-doing; and, today, if all the husbands who are unfaithful to their wives should commit suicide, as this unfortunate woman did, there wouldn't be cemeteries enough to hold them or men enough left to bury them. It is a sorrowful fact that if the still, small voice of conscience ever reproaches the average man for his infidelities to his wife, it does so in such a whisper he scarcely hears it. Remorse doesn't shout to him through a megaphone as it does to women. If you have rejected Christ and sinned against God, it will be an awful thing to have remorse overpower you there.

Who will be there? Have you read Bickersteith's description of the Judgment, in which he says:

"Yes, there was Cain, the Fratricide, the Brand
Of Murder still upon his Brow."

And a little further on in the poem, he says:

"Time's river, in that awful retrospect
Was flowing swiftly by, when lo! I heard
The traitor's name, and from among the dead
He staggered, shuddering to the Judgment Bar."

Felix will be there and Judas will be there. Will you be there? I know that Jesus will be there, either for us or against us. Which shall it be?

A distinguished minister in New York dreamed a dream in which he thought he stood at the Judgment Bar of God, and he heard Him say: Have you always been kind, and just, and patient, and true? And when he had exhausted all the virtues, the minister, renowned for his goodness upon earth, was obliged to

say that he had in his own thought failed in the light of the Judgment; when, just as he felt that all hope was gone, he saw a light above the brightness of the sun, and beheld one whose hands had been pierced by the nails, and whose side had been scarred, and He said: "Father, this man confessed me down in the world. I will confess him here." Is your trust in Jesus Christ? Then fear not.

And as he thus reasoned, Felix trembled; trembled, as sin faced him; as conscience struck him; as remorse overwhelmed him; as judgment broke in upon him; as the veil was drawn aside; and he saw the Judge and saw himself. And yet, in spite of it all, he resisted. How near one may come to salvation and miss it all!

On July 24, 1908, there was a remarkable event took place. It was the running of the Marathon race from Windsor Castle to the Stadium, twenty-six and one-third miles; with 100,000 people waiting to welcome the runners; among whom stood the Queen and King of England. Not since the ancient Greek fell dead at the feet of hundreds of thousands, after carrying a message of war a distance of twenty-six miles from the battlefield of Marathon to the public square at Sparta, was ever such a thrilling climax to a long distance run.

"Make way for the Marathon runners!" finally came the announcement as from the throat of a giant the approach of the runners was heralded through a megaphone. Everything else was forgotten, and the

crowd, on its feet, turned its face to the entrance of the Stadium. The silence was breathless. For ten minutes in perfect silence the crowd of 100,000 stood, with all eyes focused on the gate directly opposite the royal stand, where the runners were to enter. Then the great voice rang out again: "The runners are in sight. Italy is in the lead!"

Finally a figure, looking almost as small as that of a pigmy, appeared at the gate and staggered down the incline leading to the track. He was clothed in a white shirt and red running pants. This uniform confirmed the announcement that Italy was the leader in the race. The runner stood for a moment, as though dazed, and turned to the left, although a red cord had been drawn about the track in the opposite direction for the runners to follow. It was evident at once that the runner was practically delirious from his efforts. A squad of officials ran out and expostulated with the runner, pointing to him the right track, but he waved them away as though they were trying to put him upon the wrong path and cheat him out of a victory so dearly run. In a great roar the crowd shouted directions to the befuddled runner. At length Dorando, for he had been generally identified, started on the right path along the track. Then followed an exhibition never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it, and perhaps never to be witnessed again in this generation. Dorando staggered on toward the turn in the track and dropped to the ground. It was but human that those who had witnessed his struggles

should gather around him and lift him to his feet. But to all it was evident that he had run himself to the limit of his endurance. None of the spectators had expected to see him rise when he fell like a soldier crumpled up by a bullet, his face haggard and drawn. The runner was quickly lifted to his feet. Clearly he was unconscious. His limbs would not support him. One man took him by the arm, another stood at his back, and he was pushed and dragged across the tape and then allowed to drop to the track and lie there until a stretcher was brought to carry him away.

But he lost the race. He was near; he was within sight of the goal, but he lost the race. So you may have been almost persuaded, but, remember, "*almost is but to fail.*" It was against the rules for the officials to help Dorando; but it is not against the rules of God or Heaven for our Savior to step forth, when we have faith in Him, and we have done our best, to help us over the goal, and he will do this—as we fail he will help.

VI

ELDER-BROTHERLINESS

JOSEPH WILSON COCHRAN, D.D.

Secretary Board of Education
Philadelphia



VI

ELDER-BROTHERLINESS

"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends."—ST. LUKE xv. 25-32.

WITH the touch of the Master Artist, Jesus does not leave the picture of the prodigal, surrounded by the thrilling joys of his restoration, without filling in the deep shadows that throw into high relief the triumph of the repentant sinner. The deep shadows are where the elder brother of the home refuses to mingle in the festive scene. The curtain of this drama is not dropped until we are made aware of the sinister touch suggestive of tragedy. The music is not complete until the minor strains of jealousy and anger emphasize the melody of redemption.

Behold the elder brother donning his working clothes and going out into the fields in the early morning! The sun rises and beats upon his bent form, but he faints not, neither is weary. He takes his place among the toilers on the farm until, as the sun falls behind the western hills, he turns his face homeward with dripping brow and aching back, conscious of a full day's work and of toiling a little harder because of that spendthrift brother.

Nearing the house strains of music and sounds of rejoicing fall upon his ear. He calls a servant and

demands the meaning of it. "Thy brother is come and thy father has killed the fatted calf." The staid, hard-working boy, looking through the open door, sees a splendidly robed person seated at his father's right hand. "Is that my brother?" "That is he," replies the servant, "the festal robe is upon him and thy father's ring. The neighbors have been called in to make merry."

And now the pent-up passion of his heart bursts its bounds, the great injustice of it all sweeping away the flood-gates of forbearance. "Beware the fury of a patient man." He refuses to enter into the festivities. Why should he give his presence there? While the preparations for the feast, the gathering of guests, the salutations and congratulations had been working up to a climax, he, the wheel-horse of the place, the home drudge, doomed to work like a dog while his fast young brother was eating up the patrimony, had been allowed to work out his full time that happy day when the gay cavalier from the far country had at last, in his extremity, condescended to return to the arms of a too-doting father.

There is something very human about this elder brother. He is fully as typical as the prodigal. He is a familiar figure in many a home, a school, an office, a factory, and, shall I say, he is occasionally seen in religious circles? There is much to be said for him. The blood of the elder brother runs in the veins of almost all of us and, in justice to him, we should discover where lie the good points in his character.

I. The elder brother was right, *in the protection of his father's interests*. It were folly to sneer at the elder brother for leading an upright, moral life, for staying at home and keeping his father's estate intact, when he might have ruined it irretrievably by demanding his portion of the inheritance. His very strength lies in the fact that he has his own side. If the story had ended with the prodigal's home-coming we might justly infer that God loves the man who sows his wild oats far more than he who, throughout his entire life, has been exemplary and respectable. "If the Father puts the best robe and ring and shoes on the bad boy and kills for him the fatted calf, let us all be bad. It will please the Father much more and give us a better time." But Jesus has the father come and put his hand on the shoulder of the elder brother and say, with the infinite affection, "Child, (the word in the Greek), child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Those were two things not possessed by the younger son. He had lost years of fellowship with his father; he had lost the joy of partnership. The elder brother had been one with the father all these years. The younger son has disinherited himself by his wrong-doing, but for the elder there had been no break in the identification of interests between father and son, "Mine are thine and thine are mine."

Ah, let no one ever tell you that it does not make any difference to God or to your own life if you do go wrong. You will have the gown and the ring and

the shoes and the fatted calf just the same. Not at all. The prodigal could never have the unscarred life, the undisturbed conscience, the unblemished record of the elder son. God does not prefer that you should go down into the depths of sin in order that you may have nearer approach to Him. He would rather have you live the life of continued well doing, of uninterrupted service. To have fed upon the husks, to have mingled with the swine is not strength, but weakness. Habits of old indulgence are likely to spring like lions from their lairs upon the unsuspecting sinner even when "saved to the uttermost." "No," says Paul, "let us not sin that grace may abound." The elder brother was strong and true and noble in keeping within moral bounds and leading the pure, unblemished life under his father's watchful care.

II. In the second place, this elder brother was right *in hating his brother's immoral conduct*. His scornful reply to his father that the younger son had devoured his father's living with harlots, was perfectly true and no more than warranted, under the circumstances. No one can have too fierce a hatred of sin. The trouble with many Christians in our day is that they are too easy-going in the presence of evil.

Were God an easy-going, indulgent being, with no particular anger against the infractions of the laws of holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, there were no Christ, no cross, no passion. It is the flaming anger of God against sin as well as His love that sent His

Son into the world. It is the strong breath of His hatred of sin that fans the fires of his love. We might paraphrase John iii. 16, and say: "God so hated sin that He gave his only begotten Son." Yes, the elder brother was right in his consuming hatred of the younger brother's wretched life.

I. But his condemnation lay in *charging his father with injustice*. Why was it not injustice? Why should not the elder brother feel hurt and sore? Here is an elder brother supporting his widowed mother on the farm, sleeping in a little cheerless back room, while his more clever, but honest, brother riots in the distant city until, without a penny, he comes home. One day the older son listens at the door of the spare room to that mother's soothing voice, answering tenderly the faint tones of some sufferer laid upon the bed. Through the half-open door he descries the mother bending over the wrecked and wretched form of a man. Tears of love are baptizing the ungrateful bosom of the worthless son. Ah, she has never wept a tear for him, who has been supporting her all these years! She never nursed him in the front room when he was sick! Is not that injustice?

Here he is in business, working long to get up the ladder, and some one above him is disgraced and is discharged. Then he goes up another rung. But his employer comes to him and says: "I have decided to give your superior another chance. It is a case of life and death. Step down and let him come back." Is that not injustice?

Here he is, in the pew, the zealous and loyal worker in the Sunday school, the prayer meeting and the various activities of the church. He is the emergency man, the stop-gap. And now comes a new convert, a former ne'er-do-weel and scoffer. The minister calls on the prodigal and passes by the home of the worker. What has the prodigal done for the church? The minister calls upon him to testify. He makes a much lammer prayer, a much poorer appearance, but the minister cries, "God bless you!" He never said that to the elder brother. Prodigals fill up the pews and the standbys are crowded out. Every sort of attention is bestowed upon wanderers and non-supporters, while the faithful burden-bearers get little praise or thanks. Is not that injustice?

The elder brother stands in the pulpit preaching the simple gospel, flowing from the lips of a life wearing the white flower of a spotless manhood, while over yonder is a converted gambler who crowds the meeting place by telling thrilling stories of his former life. The faithful old preacher has no lurid tales of sin to tell. He brings no tears by dilating upon his former life of riotous pleasure. He never knew what it was not to love the Lord, yet the people forsake his service for the preaching of the prodigal. Is not that injustice?

Did you ever think how unjust it is for a mother to bind up the wounds of the bleeding child and never bind the leg of the unhurt one? I have lived in Philadelphia for ten years. I have seen men injured on

the street and the whole service of the city invoked in their behalf. Policemen, running to and fro, patrol wagons summoned, ambulances dashing up, hospitals opened, nurses and surgeons summoned. I say I have lived in this city ten years, and no ambulance ever made a record run for me, no surgeons or nurses ever worked over me, no hospital gave me treatment and clean clothes and medicines. And why? Because such demonstrations were never needed. I never have been hurt.

The law of economy in the spiritual realm is that the divine energy is exercised not only in behalf of those who need it, but in the direction of their need. As a matter of fact, in the realm of grace we are all prodigals. There are no elder brothers when it comes to the fact and force of sin. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Ah, what fine sarcasm, what divine irony in those words of Jesus. "*Just persons that need no repentance!*" There are none! "There is none that doeth good, no not one." Good *seems* to go further in the reclamation of prodigals than He does in the saving of the gently reared children of the Christian home, but in reality he goes as far for one as for the other. The father loved the elder brother with just as great a love as he loved the prodigal, but the love expressed itself in a different way.

"Thou never gavest to me *a kid*." How like you and me! One of the deadliest feelings to harbor is

self-pity. How easy, yet how dangerous, to work up to the idea that we are abused and misunderstood! To plant in one's heart the germ of discontent is to raise the deadly night-shade of rebellion. His regard for his father was based on that father's refusal to recognize the prodigal. That was the elder brother's condemnation! This was a message for the scribes and pharisees of that day. They had been murmuring against Jesus and saying: "This man received sinners and eateth with them." This greatest story of the world was the result of that murmur. It was for their benefit that this character was drawn. The elder brother was of that body of stiff, hard, proud, self-righteous Jews, led by the sect of the pharisees, who looked back with empty pride upon centuries of Jehovah's service. Other nations were in the far country, forgotten of God. They resented the idea voiced by the Christ that the outcast heathen, the publicans, the harlots, the scum and filth that dashed itself up in black waves against the Holy City, could ever hope for any mercy at the hands of Jehovah, the God of the chosen people. The pharisee was ostentatious and punctilious in the performance of his religious duties. He gave so many prayers for so much reward. He stood in the synagogue thanking God that he was not like the poor publican. The elder brother stands forth as "the right-living rascal" of the New Testament, a man, who lives respectably in all the outward manifestations of religious and moral conformity, but

whose heart is alien to God, whose soul is shriveled up with his unloving and self-seeking efforts.

II. The elder brother was self-condemned again because he *confused the rewards of service with the rewards of love*. Service without song, duty without delight, is like winter sunshine, impotent for growth. The elder brother was looking for so much wage for so much service. To show how little Christ cared for the wage idea, he tells us the parable of those who went into the vineyard at the first hour and also those at the eleventh, all receiving the same wage. God is no taskmaster. God gives no rewards except Himself, no wages except love. Many people imagine that if they serve God for many years they ought to be immune from sorrow and suffering and have sufficiency of this world's goods. If they do about so much, they will have the robe, the ring and the fatted calf. The elder brother thought he had earned all these things, but it was a terrible mistake. The robe, the ring, and the fatted calf were the gifts of grace, not the earnings of labor. The elder brother might have slaved till he was gray haired, he never could have them as rewards of perfunctory toil. The looking for wages and rewards shrivels the soul and weakens the spiritual constitution. God makes no commercial bargains.

Some men are meaner in their religion than others in their sin. Some men help you in a way that hurts worse than a blow. They give their charity with a kick. Their service has a recoil. They do not give

presents, they exchange them. They have done you a favor, now you return in kind. But love knows no pay-back, no requitals, no bargains. It does not understand the language of one who says: "Love me and I'll love you; favor me and I'll favor you." That might be good business, but bad grace.

Had Christ been a lawyer he might have had the prodigal sending a document from the far country like this: "Know all men by these presents, that I, the party of the first part, do hereby covenant and agree to return to the home of the party of the second part, provided the party of the second part conveys, assigns and relinquishes all right and title to the following articles, to wit: one best robe, one seal ring, one pair of sandals (best quality), one fatted calf."

But the true Christian works not for appreciation. Men and women get lukewarm in Christ's service because they are unnoticed. They pass from church to church as they are accorded attention here and there. They refuse to help because they were not consulted. Oh, beloved, consider Him "who endured such contradiction of sinners." Did it ever affect His wondrous gentleness, His majestic self-poise? Solitary, unappreciated, despised, treated with scorn, contempt and ridicule, He stands as the One who forgets all else except the fact that He loves men in the midst of their ingratitude.

III. The son was wrong again, because *he was out of sympathy with his father's way of doing things*. The elder brother was not as true a son, after all, as

the prodigal. The word "son" meant to him laborious servitude, the power of law rather than the power of love. He did not know his father's heart or understand his plan. He was out of sympathy with the father's effort to meet his son half way. Christianity is said to be, in contrast with the laws of nature, the survival of the unfit. Not at all! God will not allow the unfit to possess the earth. Redemption is not the survival of the diseased, but the survival of the healed. Christianity makes the unfit fit, just as a hospital recognizes, but does not dignify, disease. It defeats it. Elder-brotherliness wants the father to recognize the survival of the fittest, but Jesus Christ has ushered in the survival of the fitted. He "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

IV. And therefore, of course, he was wrong again in *his want of sympathy with his own brother*. He did not say, "My brother," but referred to him as "thy son." The best argument, after all, before God, is not that I am good enough, but that I am not good enough. It is the final argument, the argument of need. Dr. Bernardo of London, the great philanthropist, tells of standing at his front door one bitter day, when a little, ragged chap came up to him asking for an order of admission to the orphans' home. Pretending to be rough with him, the doctor said: "How do I know what you tell me is true? Have you any friends to speak for you?" "Friends?" the little fellow cried; "friends! No, I aint got no friends. But

if these 'ere rags," and he held up his tattered garments, "if these 'ere rags wont speak for me nothing else will."

Oh, father, why do you waste your money and your time on that little, wizened, white-faced child? Oh, mother, why do you pour out the wealth of your affection on that little cripple, who will never be able to work a stroke for you? Why should you think more of him than of the healthy, rosy-cheeked youngsters? Theoretically, you do not, but you cannot help a more fervent kiss and a closer embrace just because of his infirmity, and you cry, as one has cried before you:

"My silent child I hold you to my breast
Just as I did when thou wast newly born.
It may be sinful, but I love thee best,
And kiss thy lips the longest night and morn.
Oh, thou art dear to me beyond all others,
And when I breathe my trust and bend my knee
For blessing on thy sisters and thy brothers,
God seems the nighest when I pray for thee."

We can measure the reality of our religion by our attitude to those upon whom the thoughtless heap reproach and derision, those beyond our crowd, beyond any crowd at all, the forgotten, "the down and out," the friendless and unpopular. The pharisee walks abroad these days. If vulgar, he calls the foreigner a Dago, the drunkard a "bum." If scientific, he calls the former an alien and the latter a dipsomaniac. And it will end there. But some humble Salvation Army worker will see beneath the habiliments of the devil. He will claim fundamental kingship, the

divine-human kinship and show him the way back to the Father's home and heart. God spare us from the unforgiving and unforgivable estate of the elder brother. He lives in a far country from which there is little likelihood of return.

“God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly.”

VII

GOD AND LOVE AND LIFE ETERNAL

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VII

GOD AND LOVE AND LIFE ETERNAL

"God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—ST. JOHN iii. 16.

GOD and Love and Life Eternal—what a subject! No genius of man, no tongue of seraph or of archangel, can do it justice. The text which contains it is usually avoided. I have never preached on it before. In trying to deal with it the man in the pulpit feels like a child attempting to throw its little arms about the Rocky Mountains. Its very fullness is an embarrassment. It is immensely easier to drink out of a cup than out of the ocean. The weight of this passage, its infinite sweep, crushes a man into silence. It is the whole Bible in a sentence. No one else can condense like Jesus Christ. No one else can crowd the sun into a single dewdrop of speech like him. It points to unlimited intellectual power. Here in twenty-five words we have the whole content of the salvation of the Cross. In this short sentence we have the entire essence of the evangelical faith and doctrine. If ever there was *multum in parvo*, it is here. All our gospel songs, all our gospel victories, all Christian revivals from the beginning until now,

have come out of the truth of this text. All streams of gospel hope and life, flowing across the centuries and the continents, have issued from this fountain.

It is an expert that speaks in this passage—the supreme spiritual expert of the ages, and you know how we value expert testimony. When Lord Kelvin speaks on science, or Sir Alexander McKenzie on medicine, or John Ruskin on art, or Paderewski on music, or Marconi on electricity, or William E. Gladstone on statesmanship, all the world listens. It lifts its hat to the expert and gives him the right-of-way in his own field. Men are universally agreed that this is wise. And shall we not listen to Jesus Christ when he tells us of God and Love and Life Eternal? He speaks as one who knows, upon the highest theme of which it is possible to conceive—speaks of human need and the world's need of salvation, the costliest jewel, the most precious and transcendent gift which even God can offer to the sons of men.

First, he calls our attention to the *source* of this salvation. It is God. There everything begins. Sometimes the story of the gospel has been so told as to convey the impression that God had to be made willing to save the world by the atonement on the Cross. He has been represented as sternly and inexorably just, and that nothing could make him yield and manifest his mercy but the sacrifice of his only begotten Son. But no warrant can be found for that sort of teaching in the Bible. If anything is

made plain in the Holy Scriptures it is the fact that God does not love us because Christ died on the tree, but that Christ poured out his blood for us and drank the cup of crucifixion agony to the bitter dregs because God loved us. The Father's love was first, the Father's love is midst, and the Father's love will be last. All there is in Jesus living his life of poverty and humiliation, all there is in Jesus dying on the Cross, all there is in Jesus walking amongst us today, filling the world with light and hope, we owe to the love of God. That is the central truth of our religion, and to that truth let us cling in every wind that blows and in every experience of life. God loves us forever and ever, and Christianity and Christianity's Christ are the incarnation of that love in time and on the plane of humanity.

"God so loved the world that he gave." "*So*"—a wonderful little word. We have no line to take its measure. Crowded into it is all the yearning heart of the Infinite Father. Even Christ could go no farther in condensation. No thought, no imagination in its wildest flights can soar to the limits of that "*so*." It is speech agonizing to say a little more, stopping only because it is up against the impossible.

"So loved the world that he *gave*." We knew that word was coming. There is no surprise in it. It must come, for love cannot do other than give. Love and Give are as inseparable as the Siamese twins, as inseparable as sun and heat. The world's word is

“get,” and it is supreme in all the literature of trade and commerce and exceedingly obtrusive even in the literature of the church. More ink is used in writing it in some one or other of its forms than in writing any other. But God’s word is “Give,” and we are God’s only in so far as we have entered into its secret. If we do not give time and thought and strength and service, if our life is a stagnant pond and not a running stream, receiving, taking in, but never flowing out to bless with ministries of helpfulness and love, we are still on the outward steps of the kingdom with our backs toward the door and the door is shut.

The next thought emphasized in this incomparable saying of our Lord is the *method* of salvation. When men enter upon any great enterprise, or inaugurate any great movement, or give themselves to the prosecution of any great work, they proceed according to a plan, and that plan is the wisest which it is possible for them to devise; and if men have a way of doing things and always choose what seems to them the best way, why not God? We may rest assured that with his purpose to save the world, of the many methods that may have occurred to His mind, He selected the only one that could secure the desired result and maintain the dignity of His throne and the stability of His divine government. So he chose the method of the Cross. “He gave his only begotten Son,” and “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." It is the way of Calvary, of agony, and blood and death.

"Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forespent—forespent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forespent with love and shame.
But the leaves were not blind to him,
And the little gray leaves were kind to him,
And the thorn-tree had a mind to him,
When into the woods he came.

"Out of the woods my Master went,
And he was well content;
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When death and shame would woo him last,
From under the trees they drew him last,
'Twas on a tree they slew him last,
When out of the woods he came."

That was the way the God of love chose because he saw no other way that would meet all the conditions. "He gave His only begotten Son." Calvary is there, and from this mountain, breaking through the excessive light that enwraps it, we hear a voice saying in words of infinite sweetness, "He gave His only begotten Son." When that saying became a fact, history started off into a new stream, and the ship of civilization changed its course. A new Pilot had come to guide its destinies. Let skeptics doubt, and scoffers sneer, and blasphemers attack and atheists shut their eyes and say, "There is no sun"; let gamblers cast their dice about the foot of the cross, and buffoons and mockers go laughing by, if they will; but one thing they are compelled to admit, that empires have been lifted off their hinges by those pierced hands and

the whole world filled with new ideals by that tremendous sacrifice.

I do not wonder that the Master Himself likened this salvation to the pearl of great price. It is a most suggestive figure. The diamond, and ruby, the emerald, and sapphire, and other precious gems are hidden away in river beds or set in solid rocks, and there men seek them without loss of health or risk of life. Not so with the pearl. It belongs to the ocean. Not to the shore, but to the depths. To find it the pearl fisher must weight himself down with a stone, leap from the boatside and descend into the depths of the sea. Frequently he never rises again. Either the pressure is too great for him or he falls a prey to the shark or other monsters of the deep. It is an awful business, and furnishes an apt and striking illustration of what it cost to bring salvation to men. If ever anything was purchased at a great price, it was this. Christ's life for our life. The best beloved of Heaven nailed to the tree for us. "He gave His only begotten Son." That is God's method and that method was conceived and applied by the infinite love. There are so-called advance thinkers, and so-called liberal thinkers, even pronounced unbelievers, who say, "God is Love." It has so entered into our human thinking that men of all classes and schools are saying it. But where did they learn that God is Love? Somehow the discovery was never made till the Cross was set up. Socrates, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the philosophers of Rome, as well, had climbed very high in thought, but

they never got high enough to bring back this message. Nor did men ever learn it by turning the pages of creation. Tennyson tells us that nature is "red in tooth and claw," and so it is. Men never learned it from history, for history is full of discord, and conflict, and confusion. The only place it can be read is yonder—

"Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all."

"He gave His only begotten Son." There, and there only, can men read the blessed truth that God is Love.

Then, after this, how natural and how logical to emphasize the *scope* of this salvation. "The world," and "whosoever," are the words that indicate the reach of it. How they rebuke our little narrow programs and condemn all our small class and race antipathies. When we talk about the gospel for the black man, and for the yellow man, and for the red man, and make our appeals to send it out and give it to every creature, there are people who object and call our concern folly, and our plea sentimentalism. They think of us as somewhat belated, a good deal blinded, and as belonging to a past that has gone, and they are almost sorry to think that we are not up to date. These are the people who boast of their breadth and their advanced views and their progressiveness and all that sort of thing, when, as a matter of fact, they are like moles that have no vision, and no horizon, and no outlook, and no sympathy—nothing but the

small hole in which they burrow and hide and close their ears to the appeals of human need, as those appeals come from the four corners of the earth. "God so loved the world"—they clip off the edges of it with the shears of their selfishness, and clip them off, and clip them off, until they come to themselves—

"Me and my wife,
My son John and his wife,
Us four and no more."

It is simply amazing how men and women can read this gospel and profess to believe this gospel and seek to convey the impression that this gospel means something to them, and at the same time go through it and strike out the accent of Jesus, and limit the purpose of Jesus and run their pens through the program of Jesus, and blot out the great commission of Jesus. He says, "world." He says, "whosoever." His love throws itself about humanity and for humanity He died—for the whole, struggling, sinning, dying race of men. But they say: "Never mind about the Mongolian. Never mind about the Malay. Never mind about the Hottentot. Let us stay at home and mind our own business." Poor, shriveled, narrow souls. Poor pagans, masquerading in the garb of Christians. Do such people do any religious work at home, and about their own doors? Not very much as a rule, and that for the reason that they do not have the religious heart, which is a heart of sympathy and love. A good many of them are like a certain tight-fisted man about whom I have read. He was a church member, but

regarded Foreign Missions with a sort of superior contempt. Asked to give to this cause, he felt that his intelligence had been insulted. Then he was asked to give to Home Missions, but he refused on the ground that Home Mission money was not wisely expended. The town in which he lived was about to improve and beautify its cemetery, and it was thought that, being a man of means, and that some day his body would probably be laid there, he would surely make a liberal subscription to this cause, but "No," he said; "It does not appeal to me; those who are in can't get out, and those who are out don't want to get in"; and so he gave nothing. I repeat, it is amazing how many can read the gospel, and hear the gospel, and sing the gospel, and then do nothing to send the gospel to all the ends of the earth. All we can say is that such people have never got into the mighty swing of the purposes of Jesus. If His purpose were their purpose, His mind their mind, His love their love, they, too, would say, "the world," and "whosoever"; they would throw away their shears and let the great earth-embracing words stand as Jesus spoke them.

And now note the *condition* of this salvation. "Whosoever believeth in Him." It is impossible to conceive of anything more simple or more fundamental. Men sometimes ask why everything on the human side should be made to turn on faith. It is enough to reply, because faith is the mainspring of human conduct. It is the basis and inspiration of everything men do in the world. It is faith that moves

the machinery of life; faith that plows the soil and sows the seed; faith that leads men to go down to the sea in ships and do business upon great waters; faith that lies back of all exploration and all discovery and all conquest. Take faith out of the commercial world and immediately there is panic, banks closing their doors, and failure following upon the heels of failure. No barbarism is ever tamed, no forests are ever subdued, no mysterious seas are ever crossed, no new civilization is ever planted by skeptics who sit in their easy chairs and doubt.

The Bible is the most philosophical of books. It goes to the bottom of things. It knows that a man never does anything, never goes anywhere, never gives himself heart and soul to a cause until a mighty faith pushes him on. He may think about a thing, and think about it until doomsday, and never act. He may speculate and theorize and reason, and never move a step this way or that way. But when faith, or belief, rises up in him, it sets the whole man in motion. Where faith goes the whole being goes. That is the reason why the emphasis is on belief.

But let us be quite clear as to the full meaning of that word. I say to a man: "What do you think of Christ?" and he replies: "I think He is the Son of God. I am satisfied that He is what He claimed to be." That is the answer of the intellect. Tens of thousands stop there. But that answer does not commit them; it does not convey them over to Christ in the entirety of their nature. To think that Christ

is the Savior, is one thing. To believe on Him as the Savior and as my Savior, is a very different thing. Let me illustrate: Here is a physician, well known in the community. I have arrived at a certain definite opinion about him. I am convinced that his medical skill and ability are unquestioned. But here is another physician. I believe in him. That means, when I am sick I go to him, or when any of the members of my family are sick I put them under his care. My belief, you see, makes it a personal matter, brings me into direct connection with him. Or again: here is a bridge spanning a great abyss. It is the only way over from this side to that. I look at it; I study it; I reason about it. I am satisfied that it is well constructed, that its architectural principles are sound, and its material of the best quality. My intellect can ask for nothing more. But that does not take me over. Still I remain on this side. But now belief rises up in me. Faith says to me: "Start; make the venture; step out upon the bridge; commit yourself to it absolutely, and it will bear you over." That commitment is belief, and "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

There is a legend that a French Bishop, fleeing from his enemies, came with twelve companions to the seashore. At their wits' end to know what to do, they found two driftwood logs lying on the beach. They pushed them into the water and cast themselves upon them. The logs formed themselves into the shape of a cross, and they were borne by favorable

winds to the Flemish shore. Thus the Bishop and his friends were saved. The lesson of the legend is that no one ever cast himself upon the crucified Christ, conscious of his own utter helplessness, who was not saved. It is that casting, that cutting loose from everything else, that act of faith, that throws him upon the redeeming arm of Jesus, that brings salvation. "Whosoever," black man, or white man, poor man, or rich man, depraved man, or decent man, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

A final word as to that—the *outcome* of it. The fruit of this salvation, the fruit that grew on the tree of Calvary, is everlasting life. Not merely endless being, or eternal existence—simply going on and on forever. That is a wholly different thing. The word "life," as used in the gospel of John, means nothing less than the very tides of God, pulsing and flowing through our humanity; it means the ocean crowding into the bay, with its infinite sweetness and purity, and fulness and power; it means abounding joy, and abounding strength, and abounding blessedness, moving up, advancing, going from height to some higher height, from summit to loftier summit, still as long as Heaven is Heaven, and God is God. Merely to exist, merely to continue to retain consciousness, to know that I am I, and to keep on knowing it when all the stars are dead, is not to live. Devils exist. The spirits of the wicked, the abominable who refuse the calls of infinite mercy, exist; the slum people of our

cities, the dregs and wrecks and castaways of humanity, exist; but existence and life may be as distinct, as widely separated, as night from day, as the desert from the garden and meadow. To live is to be in tune with God. It is to have the spirit of God, and the love of God, and the peace of God, and the bliss of God, and the salvation of God—in one word, it is to have God himself grafted into our nature, filling it with his own sap and causing it to blossom with the flowers of paradise and yield fruit that is glorious and divine.

“Everlasting life”—is there anything else so worthy of striving for? Anything else that should so arouse all our manhood and womanhood to obtain? It is something that begins here, begins with faith, and goes on like a river, widening and deepening and swelling into increasing volume through time and into eternity. Go down where men are imbruted by sin; down where vice broods and breeds, where immortality in basest forms holds carnival, and you see that their great lack is life. Go among men who are slaves to business, chained to the chariot wheels of trade, pursuing the dollar at the expense of health and happiness and culture, and you see that their great lack is life. Go among the Four Hundred, where fashion reigns and affectation struts and surfeit brings disgust, where minds are inane and faces bear no marks of character, and you see that the great lack is life.

But here, for you, for them, for all, is the Lord and

Giver of life. He waits to bestow the priceless gift, and, in return for it, all he asks is faith, for "Who-soever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

VIII

MAKE JESUS KING

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VIII

MAKE JESUS KING

"Pilate, therefore, said unto Him, Art thou a King then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world."—ST. JOHN xviii. 37.

A few years ago there was a religious convention held in this country. Christian people from all parts of the world were assembled for prayer, conference and Bible study, and while thus assembled, from the other side of the sea, by cable, they received a greeting in three words, "Make Jesus King." Three of the most inspiring words that ever passed through an ocean cable from one continent to another.

This, I take it, should be the aim and purpose of every follower of Christ. To make Jesus King is not a vision or dream or idle fancy of an enthusiast, it is the fixed and eternal purpose of God. Although Jesus came into this world in the form of a servant and lived an humble life, as one who serves, yet He claimed the honor and authority of a king. Again and again He proclaimed His Kingship, but always saying, "My kingdom is not of this world." His was not to be a kingdom in royal palaces, established by the power of physical force, yet, if He had so desired, He would have triumphed gloriously, for, as He tells us, He could have summoned from Heaven twelve

legions of angels, and they would have placed Him on the throne; or, the political condition of Palestine was such at that time that, at a single word from Christ, that whole nation would have risen to arms and made Him king. But His was not to be a temporal kingdom. The claims of the multitude are always greater than the claims of one. The greatest things in this world are not costly palaces, dominion, power, but the greatest facts are sin, misery, grief, sorrow, and Christ came to deal with these and be their remedy and comfort. He did not trust to the world's hope of dominion. His kingdom was not to be attained by human force; not by legislative enactment; not by introducing a higher civilization. He began at the fountain and source of all power; He enthroned Himself in the hearts of His people—"The kingdom of God is within you."

If, therefore, Christ came into this world to be a King, and if it is God's fixed and eternal purpose to make Him King, then it logically follows, as the night the day, that it should be the aim and purpose of every follower of His to make Him King. If this be our aim and purpose, the first step toward the achievement of it will be:

I. *To make Jesus King over our own lives.*—When a person becomes a Christian he is said to receive Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Christ is represented in Scripture as standing at the door of the heart and knocking. "Behold," says He, "I

stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." That is His attitude toward every human soul—on the doorstep, knocking, knocking. He knocks by His word, knocks by His spirit, knocks by His providences. All through the day He knocks and His locks are wet with the dews of the night.

"Behold a stranger at the door!
He gently knocks, has knocked before,
Has waited long, is waiting still;
You treat no other friend so ill.

"But will He prove a friend indeed?
He will--the very friend you need—
The Friend of sinners: yes, 'tis He,
With garments dyed on Calvary."

Christ will not force open the door. He will not compel the will. To compel the will would be to destroy it, and make man a machine or an automaton, rather than a creature created in the divine image. "*If any man open the door, I will come in.*" Now, when we open the door, by taking down the bar of the will, and we receive Christ, we should not put Him down into some obscure corner of the heart, with no rights or privileges, but we should give Him the throne room; we should put Him on the throne of the heart and give Him control, and let Him reign over us and rule in us and make His will the law of our life.

To do this there must be a willing submission on our part. For how can Jesus rule in us unless we

yield to Him? This principle of submission underlies all government. Unless there is submission on the part of the citizen, there can be no government in the state. Unless there is submission on the part of the soldier, there can be no government in the army. Unless there is submission on the part of the pupil, there can be no government in the school. Unless there is submission on the part of the child, there can be no government in the home. And if Jesus is to be King, and govern our lives, there must be a willing submission on our part, a yielding, a giving up, a surrender.

It is not always easy to yield and to bring every thought and feeling into subjection to the mind and will of Christ. The old self-life is obstinate, full of evil, lust, passion, ambition, and the dictate of the self-life is,

"To live for self, think for self,
For self and none beside,
As if Jesus had never lived,
As if He had never died."

But if we only yield to Christ and let Him have His way with us, and make His will our will, He will make far more out of our lives than we can ourselves.

It is related of Mendelssohn, the great musician, that he went to Frieburg to see the great organ in the cathedral there. He was present at the vesper service and heard the organ play; and, as he listened, he felt an unquenchable desire to play upon the organ himself. When the service was over and the people had gone, he went up into the gallery and asked the custodian, who had charge of the instrument, if he might

play on it. His request was declined on the ground that the organ was a very expensive one, and he was a stranger. But he repeated his request, and by sheer importunity, was granted permission to play a few chords. The great musician sat down and let his fingers wander, at will, over the manuals and his feet over the pedals, and there came from the organ such exquisite music as the old custodian had never heard before. When he had finished the first selection, the old man, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the player, said: "And who are you, anyway?" "My name is Mendelssohn," said the player. "Mendelssohn! Mendelssohn!" and with humiliation of heart and tears in his eyes he exclaimed, "and I almost refused Mendelssohn permission to play upon my organ; almost missed the greatest joy of my life." And so it is that Christ comes, and wants to take our lives and rule over them; wants to play upon them, so to speak; but we hesitate, we withhold ourselves, we refuse Him permission, whereas if we would only yield ourselves and submit to Him, and let Him have His way with us, He would smooth out the troubles, remove the discords, and make life for us like the harmony of a sweet song.

You hear people complain of their crosses. Why have they crosses? Because their will crosses the Divine will. Whenever the human will crosses the divine will there is a cross, but when the human will is laid alongside the divine will, and we say, "not my

will but Thine be done," there is no cross. Says Tennyson :

"Our wills are ours, we know not why;
Our wills are ours to make them His."

It was Martin Luther, who, when a gentleman once met him, and familiarly tapping him on the breast with his finger, saying, "Does Martin Luther live here?" replied, "No, not Martin Luther, but Christ lives here." And that is precisely what Paul meant when he said, "It is not I that live but Christ liveth in me." Paul had so completely enthroned Christ, so perfectly had he yielded his will to the divine will, that for Paul "to live was Christ."

Let Jesus be your King. Switch over the center of control from self to Him. Let Him have His way with you. He can do far more and better for you than you can do yourself.

Let Jesus be your King. In Him the soul finds its only rest and peace. And this, after all, is the deepest need of humanity today. Far down in the human heart there is a hungering, a thirsting, a longing which this world cannot satisfy. Man has sought for it in pleasure, in position, in wealth, has attained success in them all, yet comes back, saying: "I am not satisfied; I am not satisfied." But in Jesus the soul finds rest and peace.

"A peace that is calm as a river,
A peace that the friends of this world never knew,
That Jesus alone is author and giver,
And ever stands waiting to give it to you."

For the Lord hath promised to keep them in perfect

peace whose minds are stayed upon Him, because they trust in Him. There is a point away out in space somewhere between the earth and the sun where gravitation changes. If a projectile from earth could reach that point, and pass it, it would not fall back to the earth, but would move on to meet the sun with an ever increasing velocity. So with the believer who has enthroned Christ in his heart and made Jesus his King. He is lifted above the attractions of this world, and under the stronger, inspiring, attractive power of Christ gravitates upward; while the pleasures of earth fade, the joys of heaven dawn, and the deepening twilight of earth's night becomes the opening twilight of Heaven's morn. Let Jesus be your King! Let Jesus be your King!

II. The second step in this project of making Jesus King is *to make Him King over other lives*. To get followers for Him. This is Christian service. There is a picture, no doubt, you have often seen; it hangs on the wall of many a home; it is called "The Rock of Ages." The picture is seen in two forms. Sometimes it is this: a great rock out in the sea with a cross upon it, a storm overhead, clouds dark and lowering, lightning flashing, great billows dashing and beating against the rock. In the picture is a woman who has reached up out of the water and with both her hands she is clinging to the cross. Saved by clinging to the cross. The other picture is the same with one difference. A great rock in the sea with a cross upon it, a storm overhead, clouds dark, lightnings

flashing, billows dashing, but the person in the picture, instead of clinging with both her hands to the cross, clings with one hand to the cross firmly and securely, and with the other she is reaching down to keep another from perishing, and to save another from the watery deep. This latter picture has always seemed to me to be the true conception of the Christian—first, get saved ourselves, then get some one else saved, “Saved to Serve.”

This was the Apostle Paul’s conception of the Christian life. When Paul was converted, when the bright light shone round about him on the way to Damascus, his first question was: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” And from the day of his conversion to the day of his execution, Paul counted not his life anything, if only he could win men for Christ and get Him followers. “Saved to Serve.”

This is the great mission of the Church. The Church is God’s agency in this world “to make Jesus King.” It is the one organization that has this as its distinctive mission. There are other organizations that have other objects to accomplish. Some are opposed to Christ becoming King; some are indifferent; some are in sympathy; but the Church is the one organization in all the world that has this as a distinctive work—to make Jesus King.

And, by the Church, I mean no narrow view. The Church consists of all those joined to Christ by faith, clothed in His righteousness, washed from sin in His precious blood, leaning for strength on the same arm

of the Elder Brother, laboring together in a common cause. Her supreme mission is *to make Jesus King*; and the success of the Church depends upon the consecrated efforts of her membership; every follower of Christ going out after some one else to bring him to Jesus.

We see how active men are in secular affairs, in worldly things. Take it, for instance, in the political world. Every four years each of the great political parties nominate a candidate for the presidency, a man to rule over this great American people. Then see how each party goes to work, through its organization, in every state, county, township, ward, precinct. They hold meetings, canvass, solicit votes, try in every way possible to win men to their party. What for? To put their candidate in the presidential chair. Grandeur than the mission of any political party is the mission of the Church. The Church is a great organization, a great party, so to speak, and her supreme mission is to make Jesus King, that He may reign in every heart and rule in every life. How quickly her mission would be accomplished if only all her membership were active.

One of the greatest needs of the Church today is a passion for souls, a burning desire on the part of her membership to win souls for Christ. Many of Christ's followers have a passion for wealth, pleasure, knowledge, society, travel, but the great need today is a *passion for souls*; a passion such as Dwight L. Moody had, who, while he was a business man in Chicago, at

the head of a great enterprise, made it the rule of his life never to let a day pass without speaking to some one about his soul, and God gave him scores and hundreds of souls as the reward of his faithfulness; a passion such as an elder I know of had, who, in a single winter, in his place of business, brought thirteen men to Christ; a passion such as a congregation I know of had. Their minister preached a sermon on soul winning, and asked every member present to pledge himself *to try* to win at least *one* for Christ before the year closed. It was then the last of October. The members went to work, men going out after men, women after women, young people after young people, and before the old year passed into the new, that congregation had brought a hundred to Christ, and by the following June fifty-three more; a passion such as Adoniram Judson had, who when he graduated from college, received a call from a fashionable church in Boston to become assistant pastor; everybody congratulated him; his mother and sister rejoiced that he could be right at home with them and do his life's work; but Judson shook his head and replied: "My work is not here; God is calling me beyond the seas"; and with breaking heart he left mother and sister to follow the heavenly call. The fashionable church still stands in Boston, rich and strong, but Judson's churches in Burmah have thirty-five thousand converts, and the influence of that consecrated life will live to the end of time; a passion such as had John G. Paton, going to the New Hebrides,

after many missionaries had been slain and eaten by cannibals, and saying: "We will conquer these islands for Jesus, or we will die in the effort"; and now, after half a century of self-sacrificing effort, these islands are Christian. Everywhere it is true the world over, where the people of God have a passion for souls, and consecrate themselves to the work of "making Jesus King," there is always present the power of God to convert and to save. *Get followers for Christ. Make Jesus King over other lives.*

And now, briefly, in closing, *what is the outlook? What is the prospect of Jesus being King?* When Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, was leading his troops from Spain into Italy, they encountered much difficulty and hardship in crossing the Alps; there was scarcity of food, and scant clothing, and the feet of the soldiers left the print of blood in the snow. The troops became discouraged and threatened mutiny, but their brave leader inspired them with these words, "Beyond the Alps lies Italy! Italy, with her sunny skies and fertile plains and bountiful supplies—all these would soon be theirs." Inspired by this hope, they pressed forward in the journey, crossed the Alps, and soon were encamped on the rich and fertile plains of Italy.

The Church has a difficult task before her. To "make Jesus King" is no easy undertaking. It means that hardships are to be endured, sacrifices are to be made, and self-denial will be required. But our Great Leader speaks: "Beyond these trials and tribulations

and sacrifices of earth are the joys of Heaven; Heaven, with its pearly gates and jasper walls and streets of pure gold and its pure River of the Water of Life, all these will soon be yours." And inspired by this hope we press forward in the battle.

The future of the Church is bright with hope. Her cause will triumph. Never was the prospect brighter. There are more followers of Christ this year than last. There are more today than yesterday: There will be more tomorrow than today. The evangelistic spirit pervades th Church. A "Forward Movement" accentuates every department of religious work. All the spiritual forces are moving on to victory, and the time will come:

"When every kindred, every tribe,
On this terrestrial ball,
Shall to Him all majesty ascribe
And crown Him—Lord of all."

Then servant of Christ:

"Go, labor on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Shall not the servant tread it still?"

"Go, labor on; 'tis not for naught;
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain;
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;
The Master praises—what are men?"

"Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice;
For toil comes rest, for exile home;
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,
The midnight peal: Behold, I come!"

IX

THE INCONSISTENCIES OF SATAN

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IX

THE INCONSISTENCIES OF SATAN

"If Satan is divided against himself."—ST. LUKE xi. 18.

SATAN is a bundle of inconsistencies. This is a very consequential fact. He is inconsistent in the matter of *our sins*.

Now, he says: "Your sins are too many and too great; there is no hope of salvation for you." Having first stimulated your faculty of recollection, he leads you through Memory Hall, up and down its long galleries, where the records of all that you have thought, and said, and done, are preserved. He helps you to recall each sin, the circumstances under which it was done, the restraints pushed aside, or overridden, in order to its commission, the details of its accomplishment, the unholy delight taken in it at the time, the injuries to self and others resulting from it. He makes your whole, horrid past a vivid present. All your sins are packed into one awful hour of consciousness. Then, returning to you, he says: "This is you, your *real* self; there is no hope for such an one." You condemn yourself as hopelessly a sinner. Despair is the result, despair driving toward abandonment to sin.

But, at another time, Satan tells you: "Your sins are not many, not very great; there is no danger of

being lost." He leads you to exclude from your definition of sin all ideas save that of transgression. Under his influence you revise your catalogue of sins and leave out all except positive violations of the divine commands. He pleads extenuating circumstances and shows how it was "natural," almost inevitable, for you to sin under such conditions. He helps you to trim down the guilt of each sin, to relieve its blackness, until it does not seem so awful. He suggests: "You are not worse than many Christians, even some high up in the church." He goes farther and suggests that you have not gone to the extremes to which Abraham, David, Peter, Paul went. At last your judgment almost confirms his verdict: "You are in no peril; you need no Savior."

Satan is inconsistent in regard to *God's love*. He says to you today, when your mood is favorable: "God cannot be loving, or He would never have dealt with you as He has. He has taken away your wealth and left you to the pangs of poverty; He has robbed you of your wealth; He has thwarted you in the pursuit of your high purpose; He has withheld success from you in almost every instance; He has taken away from you loved ones, and left your heart bleeding and lonely. Where is there any love in it? No love; not even common justice. Plenty have been spared. Even the wicked have prospered. God is not love. God is unjust. God is a tyrant. God is a monster." And you half believe it!

But tomorrow, your mood having changed, Satan

says: "God is too loving to punish any man eternally for his sins." Then, expert that he is in quoting Scripture, he reminds you: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life"; "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins"; "God is love." With all the ingenuity and speciosity of the sophist, he shows that the penalty pronounced against your sin in God's Word is opposed to God's nature; that

"We magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own."

that God's love is father-like, and that Christ's parable proves that the very joy of your Father God is to forgive sin. So love, the love of God, becomes the encouragement to further sin.

About *your strength* Satan is inconsistent. Anxious to begin the Christian life, he says to you: "You are not strong enough to be a Christian. Better not openly confess Christ. At the most be a secret believer." He magnifies the obstacles in the religious life; he overstates the difficulties of the duties and burdens of the heavenly way; he suppresses the many promises of God which pledge divine aid, or, at least, shows in how many cases they seem to have been inefficient; he tells you numerous instances in which others began, but were not able to continue; he reminds you how often you have tried to be true to the right, to stand in the path of righteousness, but failed. Then, with a zeal for the name of God and the reputa-

tion of the church, he suggests that to confess oneself a Christian and then to fail is to put reproach upon the fair name of Christ, to put a slur upon His church, and to bring the whole cause of religion into disrepute—an incalculable harm; and adds: “Better wait till you are stronger.” And you delay.

At another time, Satan declares: “You are strong enough to overcome; work out your own salvation.” He insists that a man, if he be worthy of the name, is able to mend his ways, to reform his life. To come to Christ is, Satan would persuade you, to make a humiliating confession of weakness. The doctrine of human inability is unmanning, and no man ought to submit to such indignity. He declares that your past failures discover your weak points, and doubly guarding those, you will be able to stand next time. “Show yourself a man!” he says to you. The result is self-trust, and consequent defeat at the last!

See Satan’s inconsistency about *death*. “Death ends all,” he would persuade you to believe. Or, if he does not deny the immortality of the soul, he tells you that it is most uncertain, that the Scriptures do not assert it plainly, and for all men, and that science discredits it. This life being all of which you are assured, he advises you to make the most of it; to get out of it all possible pleasure, even if you have found an element of sin in your pleasures, it need not disturb you, for there is little fear of punishment hereafter, since the hereafter itself is improbable. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.” Perhaps you

own a vest-pocket edition of the Rubiayat, and old Omar's philosophy is yours also. So you are tempted to "make the most of life," which, honestly interpreted, means: Get all pleasure possible, and do not be over-scrupulous about its character.

At other times, however, Satan tells you the flatly contradictory: "Death does not end all." With ingenuity he argues for the life beyond. This life at its best is incomplete. Science and the Bible agree in pronouncing the hope of a future life reasonable. There are affections unsatisfied here, hopes unrealized, purposes unaccomplished. "There are no half-hinges in God's universe." Then, he goes on to argue: "God is unchanging, the same there as here, always loving, always merciful. He will not deny you opportunity for repentance there. There will be another chance. You need not be too careful now." And thus you are in danger of losing the offered salvation here in running the risk of a chance which is not to be hereafter.

Closely akin to this is Satan's inconsistency about *tomorrow*. This may have briefer treatment. "Tomorrow you are not sure of, therefore make sure of today." He quotes the classic phrase, "*Carpe diem*," and reinforces it by the Scripture counsel, "Buy up the opportunity." *Now* is his great watchword. The world has caught it up and acts upon it. Haste to be rich, haste to come to high position, are phrases of the peril. The shortest, quickest way, rather than God's often longer way round, you are advised to choose.

But, when it suits his purpose, Satan tells you: "*To-*

morrow is certain, you need not hurry, wait." Your judgment tells you that you ought to be a Christian; conscience urges you to immediate surrender to the claims of Christ; the Bible tells you that life is uncertain, that death is sure, that opportunity is limited to this life, that God's Spirit will not always strive with you; the Spirit Himself urges you, impels you, saying: "Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation." But Satan whispers: "Tomorrow will do," and you are in greatest peril of delay. One has rightly said that "Procrastination is suicide in which more than blood is spilt."

These are some inconsistencies of Satan, and they concern the greatest facts and issues of life. If they had to do with trifles they would not be so serious. But his inconsistencies concern sin, God's love, continuance in the spiritual life, death, and promptness in accepting the salvation offered by Christ. I charge, therefore, that Satan, because of these inconsistencies, is utterly unworthy of your confidence and following. Since he alters his teachings to suit your moods and his own purpose, you are foolish to believe what he says. Since he would lead you now to one course of action and now to another, it is little short of madness to follow his leadership. He is utterly untrustworthy.

"But," you have been waiting, impatiently, to say: "I do not believe in a personal devil; Satan has no real existence for me; what you say, therefore, is robbed of its power, so far as I am concerned." For the purpose of my present plea, I care not whether

Satan be a person; or the mere personification of the abstract principle of evil in the world, or in your own heart.

If you claim that Satan is merely a name for the abstract principle of evil at work in the world, I remind you that it is impossible to think of evil, which is a moral attribute, apart from a moral being. The only thing you can mean is that Satan is the evil incarnated in the men and women of today, expressed in the thought, the teaching, the conduct of the age, the *zeit-ghost*, the times-spirit, if you please. Grant this. Then I charge that there is gross inconsistency in the opinions, the counsels, the example of the times-spirit, and it is not worthy of your confidence. You are foolish if you follow the leadership of the age.

Or, do you hold that Satan is but the personification of the evil that is in yourself? Milton puts into the mouth of Satan the words: "Myself am hell." You virtually say: "Myself am Satan." Are you ready to stand by this, and for all that it implies? It is an awful confession to make, that all the horrible thoughts that come into your mind, that all the awful solicitations to wrong-doing, that all the evil deeds which you do have their alone origin in you, and are the expression of your real self? Being such an one, apart from all consideration of the existence of a personal devil, it seems to me that in utter terror you would fly instantly to God and accept salvation on any terms, in order to be saved from yourself. But, what concerns me now is to charge that, being Satan to

yourself, *you* are grossly inconsistent, and are not worthy of self-leadership.

But if Satan be a real person, as Christ, both by His silences and utterances—altogether inexcusable if they be due to ignorance or accommodation—leads us to think of him, and, *as I verily believe him to be*, then again, and with increased emphasis, I charge that he is, because of his habitual inconsistency, disqualified for teaching and leadership, and none but the most foolish will trust him.

Over against the inconsistent Satan stands the consistent Christ. Being the Father's Son, what is true of the Father is true also of Him; with Him there "can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, having tested His constancy, lauds and commends Him as "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Christ claims to be the Teacher, the Leader, the Savior of men. He insists that men hear His words, follow His leadership, trust Him for salvation through time and eternity. Many characteristics qualify Him for this work: His wisdom, His power, His love, His patience, His sympathy. To these and other qualifications add His consistency.

He is consistent in His teachings. His words ring true to each other. Those spoken late in His ministry show no variance from his earliest utterances. Those spoken in the privacy of the little circle of disciples agree perfectly with the discourses delivered to great

multitudes. Yea, even in His utterances to God there is entire accord with His speech to men. "Never man spake like this man," not only in the largeness of grasp, the sameness, the balance of His words, but in their consistency as well. In His teachings sin is always and everywhere the abominable and deadly thing; God is always the holy and loving Father; death is the end of opportunity to repent; and today is the only sure period for holy work. You can trust Him implicitly in all that He says.

He is consistent in His work. Look at it in its sweep through eternity. He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Before His incarnation we catch glimpses of Him through vision of seer and occasional theophany, and He is invariably concerning Himself for the salvation of men. Throughout His earthly career one aim, one effort engages all His energies, the redemption of the world from sin, His post-resurrection life one with His pre-crucifixion life in this purpose and labor. By the help of the apostles we get visions, now and then, of the ascended Christ, and invariably He is working for the accomplishment of our salvation. And prophets, both of Old and New Testament times, tell us that He is restlessly, actively "expecting" until the last of His own is entirely redeemed. You find this consistency unmatched in the annals of time. Such consistency makes Him worthy of your following.

Trust this consistent Christ. Trust Him now. Trust Him unhesitatingly. Trust Him with every-

thing. Trust Him for time and eternity. Trust Him to fulfil all His gracious promises. Trust Him to do all that He offers to do. O turn once and forever from the inconsistent Satan to the consistent Christ, knowing that since He is true to Himself, He therefore can not be false to any man!

X

SANCTIMONIOUS EXCUSES

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X

SANCTIMONIOUS EXCUSES

"Is it not enough that you have wearied men, will ye weary my God also?"—ISAIAH vii. 13.

AN exceedingly instructive bit of history this from which the text is chosen. Briefly, it is the story of a Godless King, who speaks pious words. In the colloquy recorded, Ahaz appears to better advantage than Isaiah. Not that Ahaz was altogether bad. History permits the assertion that this king had some excellent qualities. Although an idolater, at times he espoused the true religion. We may even strain a point in our zeal to do him full justice, and class Ahaz among the average men of the world, who talk in a beautiful and pious way about religious matters, while spurning every offer of God's salvation.

Let us step back a little from the context that we may gain a proper perspective of the man. Elsewhere (2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 6) we learn that King Ahaz has been twice defeated; once by the Syrians and once by the Israelites. Emboldened by their victories, these nations unite in an effort at extermination. The chapter opens with a picture of the united forces laying siege to Jerusalem. "The king's heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Verse 2 indicates the state of panic within the royal city, occasioned

by the siege. Every one is in trepidation; all are pessimistic. No, not all; the preacher keeps his head. The value of one man of faith in a great crisis is here exemplified. God directs His servant, Isaiah, to proceed at once to the king with a message of assurance and an offer of deliverance. The terms are the simplest possible. Ahaz is to break his alliance with a heathen power and commit his entire case to God. When God's message of salvation is delivered, Isaiah detects the shadow upon the countenance of the king, which he interprets as doubt, and he presses upon Ahaz the importance of faith—"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (verse 9). But the shadow lingers and God directs the preacher to give the hesitating king a crutch for his weak faith. "Ask thee a sign of the Lord, thy God; ask it, either in the depth, or in the height above." (Verse 11.) Elaborated somewhat the preacher is saying: "You are doubting God's willingness or ability to accomplish this great deliverance. If so, prove Him; ask of Him a sign; seek from Him some token—let it be anything you wish, ask it in the realm above you, or the realm about you that you may know His servant is holding out no false hope." O the patience of God with one who stands undecided upon the threshold of salvation.

But it is not a question of doubt; it is a matter of self-surrender. Isaiah has drawn a chalk line and Ahaz has determined he will not cross it. He dare not risk God's displeasure by a flat refusal of salva-

tion, so he resorts to a sanctimonious excuse: "I will not ask (for a sign), neither will I tempt the Lord." (Verse 12.) These words sound well; they make it appear that Ahaz's faith needs less bolstering than Isaiah's. The prophet, however, is too keen a reader of human nature to be deceived by such sanctimoniousness; he knows perfectly well that Ahaz is merely evading decision. We may imagine that it is with some degree of righteous indignation that he speaks out the words of our text, "Is it not enough that you weary men, will you weary my God also?" If I may descend to modern paraphrasing, Isaiah's remark is this: "You make me tired, with your insincere piety." In that hour of evasion, when the messenger of God stood before the besieged king, pressing upon him God's offer of salvation upon terms of immediate self-surrender, the fate of Jerusalem was decided for more than two thousand years. The text suggests two very practical thoughts which have direct and personal application to this hour and to this gathering.

Observe that men remain unsaved and outside of the Church chiefly because they evade God's offer of salvation. When the offer is made, how many can you find who will make bold to say: "I do not want to be saved"? Few, indeed. Who is not expecting to be saved some time? To a certain point, in the effort at soul-winning, the minister's work is not difficult. When he declares that the citadel of life is besieged by a strong alliance of temptation, habit, sin and ruin; that of himself man cannot lift the siege; that God

only is able to deliver the soul from death, the eyes from tears and the feet from falling, there is almost universal approval from the pew. It would seem to be a work of supererogation to spend much time in an effort to convince an audience of average intelligence of the fidelity of such statements. The most unrepentant sinner will follow the minister to this point. But, just at the point of decision the battle is lost as Isaiah lost it. Very clearly did Ahaz realize the danger of his situation and the impending doom of the city. When, however, the line was drawn by the prophet and the panic-stricken king was asked to step over the line to God and deliverance, he evaded the issue and sought to hide himself under the pious reply, "I will not ask for a sign, neither will I tempt God." What a flimsy covering for a godless heart. Not reverence, but rebellion, prevented Ahaz from stepping out from beneath the cloud into the sunlight of God's loving favor and deliverance. Sanctimonious excuses! They have covered the shame of none and have lured thousands upon thousands to their ruin.

After receiving the most explicit instructions utterly to destroy Agag, king of Amalakites, both men and women, oxen and sheep, camels and asses, King Saul obeyed only in part and spared the best of the sheep and oxen and lambs and all that was good. So great was God's displeasure that he sent the prophet Samuel to meet the returning conquerer with a well-merited reproof. But the sinner did not wait for the

preacher to deliver his message. As soon as Saul saw Samuel his conscience reproved him. A guilty conscience needed no accuser. Hoping to cover his own confusion and throw sand into the preacher's flashing eyes, the king began some pious talk: "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Quick as a flash Samuel tore away the mask of piety with the question: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And the conscience-smitten king is again ready with a pious answer. "The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord." Here is a double evasion. He throws all the blame upon *the people* and justifies his own disobedience on the ground that it was for a good purpose. Brushing aside the sanctimonious excuses, Samuel drives the sword of truth straight home in the words: "To obey is better than sacrifice. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou has rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected thee from being king." (1 Sam. 15.)

And what is the immediate application of these citations? This: Men are today evading the direct appeal of the pulpit by just such sanctimonious excuses. As a way out of his dilemma the unsundering hearer tells the minister that God is too good and loving to permit any one to be lost. Think you God is flattered by such compliments from one who can stand unmoved beneath the thunderings of Sinai and the dark-

ness of Golgatha? The excuse is a mere evasion, and the Savior's answer to it is this: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. x. 32.) Who does not know that in the gift of His Son God has done all that He can to save the world, and He now leaves every one to settle the matter for himself whether he will or will not enter the wide-open door of salvation?

Another apology: "I realize my need, and I am trusting in Christ as my Savior, but I am not good enough to join the Church." A sanctimonious excuse; almost never anything but an evasion of what is known to be the path of duty. Any honest man, well-versed in the Bible, and observant of present-day conversions, knows well enough the speciousness of such pious talk. To whom did Christ's call come? Let the Savior answer for Himself: "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." From which it follows that the greater yours is the louder is Christ's call to you to accept salvation and come into His church.

Again, some one evades the direct appeal of the pulpit in such words as these: "I realize my need of salvation, but I must not join the church; I fear I may bring reproach upon Christ and His cause." They say a poor excuse is better than none; but surely this is not even a *poor* excuse. Turn anywhere you will in the story of the earthly life of our Lord and note how

this reproach was the very thing which Christ courted. Over and over again did the pharisees call Jesus the friend of publicans and sinners. A church that can harbor a Saul of Tarsus, a vacillating Peter, a sinning Mary, a dying thief and a perfidious Judas will not suffer much from the addition of even so great a sinner as you represent yourself to be.

Or the evasion may take this form: "I cannot think of giving Christ this wreck of a life, this bankrupt character. I must bring forth fruits meet for repentance. I must lay up some treasures of good deeds, holy thoughts, high resolves, before I can entertain the hope of becoming a church member." Believe me, my hearer, your reasoning is wrong. "All the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him." Should you defer this important step for twenty years (which God grant you may not), you would then be in the same frame of mind as at present, and would come into Christ's Church as all other true seekers, with such words as these upon your lips:

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to you for grace;
Vile, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Away with such excuses! They are not a whit more sincere or germane than the pious babble of the unrepentant and unsundering Ahaz.

Every excuse is an evasion, when one stands before the open door of salvation upon whose arch is carved

in everlasting letters the unconditioned invitation, "Whosoever will may come."

The other thought suggested by the text is this: In these evasions of the pew lie the chief discouragement to the pulpit. The charge is often heard that the minister no longer preaches the Gospel. Is it not more generally true that the hearers evade the Gospel? The pulpit thunders against sin and calls upon the sinner to repent, and those in the pew console themselves with the reflection that, quite probably, the preacher has upon his heart the poor wretch in the slums or the heathen in a remote land.

In preparing a narrative upon the state of religion for presentation to Presbytery, I was greatly interested in some of the replies which pastors sent in answer to this question: "What are the chief discouragements to the work in your field?" The pastor in one of our best churches expressed the disappointment of his own heart in these words: "The chief discouragement in this field is that there are no sinners." This pastor was voicing the sentiment so strikingly expressed by Isaiah.

How often in public address and private conversation you have been led, step by step, to the very verge of decision only to waiver and fall back upon some pet excuse quite as flimsy as that offered by King Ahaz. Prayer, entreaty, encouragement have been resorted to, without avail. One communion succeeds another; the years stand in long line dreading the time when they must witness against you; a multitude

of unimproved opportunities, like rejected angels, are weeping their entreaty beside the portal of salvation, but the same excuses are heard, you remain unmoved. Is it not enough to tax the patience of any one? Well may the pastor join in the lament of Jesus: "We have piped unto you and you have not danced, we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented." Such was the Master's disappointment at the procrastination of the well disposed.

After all, of what use are excuses? They neither justify your indecision, nor do they hide your shame. You are not deceiving God by sanctimonious apologies, nor are you deceiving your minister, nor yet are you deceiving yourself. No need that one shall tell you it is not the excuse over which you stumble, but the will. You know perfectly well that it is not fitness that keeps you out of the Church, but unwillingness. Is it not enough that you have wearied your minister, who, since your childhood, has pleaded with you to give your heart to God? Will you weary God also? Is it not enough that you have wearied a devoted Sabbath school teacher, whose advice and love have followed you through the years? Will you weary God also? Is it not enough that you have wearied a godly father, and a praying mother, both of whom have crossed the threshold of the stars? Will you weary God also. Angels weep! that we should lead men to the very gate of paradise only to see them turn away and rush on to destruction.

Are we to understand that God is wearied by our

long delay? Verily, yes; but never to the point of turning his back upon any sinners who will come to Him. The father may give up in despair, the mother may cease all effort, save prayer, the minister may pronounce you a hopeless case, but Christ will follow you with his yearning until death shall have closed forever the door of opportunity.

Some years ago I brought into my household an orphaned boy of about twelve. His father and mother had been early friends of mine. Raised on a farm, the lad had never before seen a city. To tell of my experiences during the first few weeks would be amusing, but I pass that by as having nothing to do with our present discussion. During the months that followed a strong attachment developed between us. The boy was never more happy than when in my company. We would sit by the hour and talk over his studies, his pleasures, and his ambitions for the future. But one day I thought I detected a change in the lad. I endeavored to dismiss the suspicion from my mind, but it persisted. There could be no doubt about it, something had disturbed our tender relations. Naturally enough, in seeking an explanation, I sent my memory back over the path of the yesterdays in search of some blunder or oversight upon my part, but could recall nothing which would furnish an explanation of the boy's behavior. After assuring myself that I had not changed in my attitude towards the boy, I began as tactfully as possible to study my ward. Whenever I talked with him his eyes sought

the ground; when I took him out walking, he lagged behind; when I invited him to bring his books into my study (which had been his former delight) he excused himself, and finally, for various reasons, he did not find it convenient to join me at meal time. At my wit's end, I finally sought out his day school teacher, who informed me that he had been very naughty. After apprising myself of all the facts, I called the boy into my study. At first he would not enter, but stood with his foot in the crack of the door, thus preparing himself for a hasty retreat should occasion demand. But, I reassured him by saying that he need have no fear of me since I would always remain his true and kind friend. When he was seated opposite to me I began our conference with a few leading questions; had I been unkind to him at any time? had I denied him any legitimate pleasure? had I overlooked his needs? was he feeling well? etc. Then I closed in upon him with my questions, and little by little I drew forth the confession, and then the tears, and then a perfect storm of repentance which broke me up quite as much as it did the lad. But when it was all over and the full confession had been made to me and reparation made to the teacher in the shape of a note of apology, the clouds broke, and through the tears I could see the sunshine. Immediately, Harry was himself again, and we were upon the same terms of intimacy as before. As the boy sat before me that evening, giving me, sentence by sentence, the story of his guilt, which I already knew, I thought I under-

stood, as never before, the great importance of a confession of one's sins to Christ and public acknowledgement of Him as Savior. Christ yearns to have you draw near to Him, but so long as you excuse yourself from the confession, which must be made before forgiveness can be granted, there will remain between you a wide gulf of separation.

Oh, the patience of Christ, who can measure it? When man refused to crown Him King of his life, Jesus took the thorns and crowned Himself monarch in the Kingdom of Disappointment; when man declined to lay hold of those outstretched hands of Mercy, Jesus spread them forth and nailed them to the cross in everlasting testimonial that "Whosoever will may come"; when man spurned the love that paid the price of sin, Jesus opened his side and revealed to the world a broken heart.

XI

THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER

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XI

THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER

"And he was angry and would not go in."—ST. LUKE xv. 28.

Those of you who have seen Tissot's water-color portraiture of Palestine will remember an associated group of four remarkable paintings, done in oil, which strikingly and successfully modernize Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son. The first painting represents a modern Anglo-Saxon home. The younger son is engaged in earnest conversation with his father, receiving his parting injunctions, before taking passage for foreign parts on one of the vessels which are visible through the window, where the elder son is idling. The second painting represents the younger son at the end of his voyage, in Japan, fascinated by the allurements of life in the land that has been the "far country" to so many young Englishmen. The third painting represents a sailing vessel unloading cattle and swine at an English quay. On the quay, in the embrace of his father, is the younger son, barefooted, bedraggled, unkempt, having, evidently, worked his way homeward as a common sailor, but with something more than a homesick feeling in his heart. The fourth painting represents an English family at dinner. The younger son, now properly clothed, his face bronzed with exposure, is seated in the place of honor.

At the table is one empty chair. The elder son, for whom it has been placed, is standing at the head of the piazza steps, which lead to the water-side, where a boat is in waiting, its crew in racing trim. There is one empty seat in the boat. Midway between the two empty seats is the elder son. At first glance you might think him irresolute and undetermined as to whether he will go or stay. But, see, he is dressed in boating flannels; he has made no preparation for dinner. If you think that his former deliberate intention has been overcome, look at his mother's or his father's face, with their unmistakable sorrow and disappointment; then you will know surely that he will occupy the vacant place in the boat, and that his place at the family table will be empty.

As I take it, this characterization of the elder brother is the real objective in Tissot's four paintings. He has seen, and I think rightly, that Jesus intended the elder brother to be the emphatic, foreground figure in the parabolic group; and that the motive of the parable was to correct the habitually uncharitable deportment of the scribes and pharisees who murmured, saying: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." The younger son is a "publican," the elder is a pharisee; the younger is a "sinner," the elder is a scribe; one is immoral, the other unspiritual; one is a sensualist, the other a formalist; one is the slave to impulse, the other to convention; one is consciously self-ruined, the other unconsciously self-righteous; *but both are prodigals*—one is a prodigal squandering

his father's wealth, the other a prodigal squandering his father's love, and both reprehensible in that *neither satisfies the father-heart that is yearning for the love of his sons*. The truth of these statements will become apparent if we undertake an analysis or character-study of the elder brother.

The spirit of the Prodigal's brother is not filial, but servile.

Christ portrays him not as a son, but a servant. "He was angry and would not go in." Angry? And yet never had a son so loving a father! Through all the years men have unstintedly admired this father who, when his prodigal son was a great way off, "ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." The generations acknowledge him as the most fatherly of fathers. But you cannot accept him as such, without recognizing in the angry boy the most unfilial of sons. The two characters are at opposite poles. Zechariah, in one of his prophetic visions, saw the Mount of Olives cloven in twain; one-half removed toward the north, the other toward the south, and a very great valley swept through from east to west. Like such disparted mountain peaks are these two lives. There is in them no harmony of motive, no unity of feeling—they are essentially incoherent. Although united in a nature base, as mountains, though dissevered, unite in their granite foundations, there is a great valley between them. Whoever exults in the delightful paternal spirit of one of these characters must lament the debased filial feeling of the other. Certainly there is lit-

tle of the spirit of a son in those words with which the prodigal checks the entreaties of his father: "Lo, these many years do I *serve* thee." No man can be at the same time a serf and a son, and he has abdicated his filial relationship who makes his father a taskmaster and himself a slave. Couple with this statement of his feelings his unseemly behavior. A true son, with a genuine love for a parent, coming home and being surprised by music and dancing, would have sought his father to determine his wishes, but this son gives the confidence that belonged to the father to a slave, and permitted a servant's gossip to inflame his mind with rage. Then, finally, as if to certify his abdication of sonship, he affixes, like a seal upon a document, this final word: "When this thy son." Not "this, my brother," but "thy son." But do you not see that in denying that he is related to the prodigal, he denies that he is related to the prodigal's father? With such skill has the Master's artist touch spread the colors that make this portrait of the prodigal's brother, that it seems impossible that any should mistake his character and call him a son who is only a slave, or that a filial spirit which is only servile.

And is not this man an ideal scribe, a pharisee of the pharisees? Did not this man turn all the privileges of the children of God, in the Hebrew period, into serfdom? In his very prayers and alms was he not an hireling, thinking always of his reward? And while he carefully obeyed Jehovah's law in jots and

tittles, did he not disown the spirit of sonship and crucify it upon Calvary's cross?

The virtues of the Prodigal's brother are passive, not positive.

Lest we should be guilty of mismeasurement, let us use the elder brother's estimate of himself: "Neither transgressed I, at any time, thy commandment." Allow that he always kept his father's commandments; but did he do only what he was commanded to do? Grant that he never did any wrong; but did he ever do any good? Confess that he never acted wickedly; but did he ever act worthily? What did his life compass in its positive aspects? He never shamed his father, but did he ever bring him honor? He never broke his father's heart by living in a far country, but did he gladden his father's heart while living with him at home? He never squandered his money, but did he use it well? He never became chargeable with sins of commission, but was he free from sins of omission? No weeds had been allowed to cumber his soul-garden, but had ever a good thought sprung up unsown, or a kindly deed blossomed spontaneously in his life?

No! So far as Christ's portraiture is concerned, No. And the portrait is clear and its outline distinct. Nothing in it exhibits the Prodigal's brother as possessing positive virtues. His whole character is passive and negative.

And is not this a miniature portrait of all pharisees and scribes? Was not their religion a passion of fear

lest one of the moral precepts of Jehovah's law had been broken, lest one of the ritual observances had been omitted, or some ceremonial demand neglected? But "Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites," says He who knew what was in man; "Woe unto you, for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone." "Judgment, and mercy, and faith," the great positive, inclusive precepts had been omitted, and their omission had made religious hypocrites.

The heart of the Prodigal's brother is uncharitable.

How harshly the pharisee speaks of the penitent! "This thy son who hath devoured thy living with harlots." Was the statement specifically true, or was it only an uncharitable suspicion? That the prodigal came home beggared suggested riotous living; it may even have proved it; but "devoured thy living with harlots"—where had the prodigal's brother secured the proof of that? That seems to be the too eager suspicion of an uncharitable mind, for "charity thinketh no evil." However, it is not merely a lack of charity toward the brother, but toward the father as well. Had his feelings been tender toward his parent, he would assuredly have removed objectionable words from his indictment and would never have grieved unnecessarily his father's heart, especially now when it is beginning to react from the woeful burden of years. His severity is his condemnation. Such con-

duct is without excuse, but not without explanation. That is to be found in the universal tendency to use other men's sins as a favorable background for our own pale, languid, virtues. We readily argue with ourselves that we are better than the worst, and even better than the average, and our pharisaic self-righteousness would "calm and subdue our fears" were it not for the voice of conscience affirming the absolute and the voice of revelation demanding, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." There is much satisfaction in praying the pharisee's prayer, but it dissolves before that solemn declaration of the inspired word: "Wherefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for in that thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest does the same things."

A further explanation of the elder son's uncharitableness lies in a fact, of which every man is conscious when he becomes a close student of his own heart—that the very sins that we most readily and harshly condemn in others, are ones to which we are especially liable ourselves. It is a universal law that our censure of another's weakness indexes our own. We bluster furiously against other men's faults, as if in this manner we were strengthened against our own. It appears, then, that the reason why the elder son so loudly denounces his brother's prodigality, is that he is specially susceptible to prodigal vices himself. He has never been in the far country, with the means of idleness and dissipation in his hands; he has never

faced the peculiar enticements and besetments of young men away from home; he has never been among riotous livers to feel the strands of deeds twisted into cables. Ah, he has never seen and felt these things and suffered in them. The evidence of it is his lack of fellow-feeling. But place the half fortune in his hands, let the long sea leagues stretch themselves between him and his father's house; let far Japan weave its spell about his daily life, and it is altogether likely that his history will parallel that of his younger brother. His overwrought protest indicates that he himself is a potential prodigal, perhaps an incipient prodigal, needing only an opportunity or an environment or an atmosphere to develop sub-conscious possibilities into hideous facts.

How surprisingly accurate is this elder brother portrait of the pharisees and scribes! "They trusted that they were righteous, and despised others." How uncharitably they spoke of "publicans and sinners." How scrupulously they shunned them, as if their contagion were worse than leprosy. Securely sheltered in the roadstead of their customs and traditions, respectable by birth and position and income, they knew nothing of the storms that buffeted those upon the open sea. They who never knew a storm adjudged themselves fit critics of those whose lives were broken and dismantled by the tempest of passion, and those who had never known temptation despised those who had passed between the rock and the whirlpool. In

this parable Jesus says to the self-confident landsman :
"Put yourself in the mariner's place."

"What though thy brother drifts upon the tide.

A broken wreck on life's tumultuous sea;
Hadst thou but touched the rocks that pierce his side—
Had winds contrary beaten down on thee,
Would'st thou, unscathed, have reached the harbor kind?
Think, then reply,
If doubt doth tinge thy mind—
Judge not!"

"Judge not the workings of his brain,

And of the heart thou canst not see,
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God's pure light may only be
A scar brought from some well-won field
Where thou wouldst only faint and yield."

I have asked you to notice that an unfilial spirit, passive virtues and an uncharitable heart make up the ill-features of the elder brother in this parable of Christ. We have looked closely enough to discover that this is an intentional and veritable portrait of the pharisees and scribes; but have we realized that it is *our portrait, yours and mine?* We never lived in the "far country," but at home; nor has our experience been that of the prodigal, but that of the elder brother. We have lived in the gracious environment of the Christian home and church; our's has never been the life of "riotous living." It is a sorry picture, but it is yours and mine if we, too, have an unfilial spirit, passive virtues and an uncharitable heart. All the insufficiencies of the elder brother may be gathered into one, that he is *so unlike his father and so out of sympathy with him.* And this, too, is our condemna-

tion that while we call ourselves sons of God we are unlike Him in spirit and sympathy. Can you recall the final incident in "Dombey and Son"? Little Paul is dying. The river of Time had borne his tiny life-vessel to the infinite sea. Caught by its resistless tide, he had been carried so far that those nearest never thought to hear his treble call again, when suddenly the tide turned, caught his frail bark in its flood, swept it back from the deep, and brought him within the hail of those who watched and loved. Paul put his hands together, as he had used to do at prayers, and an expression of intensest eagerness overspread his face as he undertook to speak: "Tell them that the print on the stairs is not divine enough." In his dying vision, at the margin of the shoreless sea, he had seen his Pilot, face to face. The vision came when adoringly he folded his hands. Until that moment his conception of Jesus had been colored like the picture of Him that hung half way up the stairs at Blimmer's School. Now that he has caught, for a single moment, the ineffable vision of the real Jesus, he rallies all the faded energies of his flickering life and calls back his one last supreme message to his school-boy friends: "Tell them that the print on the stairs is not divine enough."

You and I are "prints" of Christ. We paint them in our daily life, and then we hang them on the great staircase, where our school-fellows pass and repass, some of them climbing up and up, and others going down and down, and out into the night. But whether

they go up or down, our replica of the unseen Christ meets their eyes and influences their lives, either inspiring them to the heights of God, or discouraging them to indifference and despair. Ho! Schoolmate, is the print on the stairs divine enough? It is possible that our prodigal brother went so jauntily down his evil course, neglectful alike of warning and appeal, just because our print on the stairs was not divine enough. It is possible, too, that the reason why some of our school-fellows never aspired, or never struggled up the ascents, or clambered up so slowly and haltingly, was that the prints on the stairs was not divine enough. They did not find in us true replicas of our Savior, Christ, and our Father, God.

Our first duty is the confession of our sin to God. When the Father came out and entreated the prodigal's brother, there must have come to him a sense of his own unworthiness and meanness and sinfulness that extinguished the angry fires in his spirit, and then, I think, as there came the revulsion of feeling, his heart must have been broken by the infinite tenderness and amazing love of the father, as he said: "Son, thou art ever with me and all that is mine is thine." I know that there are unfathomed depths of love in that earlier expression of the parable: "When he was yet a great way off." Within it I can find Bethlehem and Nazareth, Judea and Galilee, Gethsemane and Golgotha—all the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who was God, manifest in the flesh, for our redemption. But there are the same

wonderful depths in these later expressions: "Therefore came his father out and entreated him, Son thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine." It is to a Father who loved like that that I have been unfilial; in contact with love like that I have remained passive and discontent; in the midst of love like that I have been foolish and selfish and idle. "Father, I loved myself, not Thee; and by loving myself amiss I lost myself." "I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight and am no more worthy to be called Thy son."

"O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee:
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths, its flow
May richer, fuller be."

Our next duty is the confession of our fault to our brother. Listen, brother prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy brother. In my religious life I have been living selfishly, never willing to share the heart-vigils of our Father, nor ever eager to make a quest in the direction of His love. Occupied with myself, and unsympathetic, my print on the stairs has misrepresented the divinest thing in the world, the love of God. I have measured it by my own proportions, and put round its limitlessness my own boundaries. Now I see that he who will not love his neighbor as himself, cannot love God with all his heart.

Now, too, I know the meaning of the Master's word: "If any man will be My disciple let him . . . take up his cross and follow Me." I had thought that every burden was a cross, but now I see that there can be no cross for the man who has no sympathy with his fellow's struggle and his fellow's sin. Christ's cross was not suffering, but suffering for another's sin. And my cross is not mere pain, but it is my heart-pain, my passion because of my fellow's sin. This is "fellowship in the sufferings of Christ." This is the way of the cross. It shall hereafter be my way. Will you make it yours? Cannot we, realizing our relationship to our Heavenly Father, become pilgrims together in the paths of glory and virtue? Let us, for the sake of those who have never heard, or having heard, have never believed, bring ourselves to our best, and, on the crowded stairs of life, so paint the redeeming Christ, in His transcendent Divinity, that our long-lost brothers, struggling helplessly with their sin, shall believe in Him as the infinitely loving God, reconciling the world unto Himself.

XII

NO IMPOSSIBILITIES WITH GOD

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XII

NO IMPOSSIBILITIES WITH GOD

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."—ST. MATTHEW xix. 26.

THESE words are found in the course of the conversation of our Lord with a certain rich young man who came asking what good thing he might do in order that he might have eternal life. The Great Teacher told him to keep the commandments. The young man, doubtless in all sincerity, inquired, which? In reply, our Lord gave him a masterful summary of the law. To this the rich young man, still sincere, replied that he had kept all these from his youth up, and inquired what he still lacked. Then the Great Teacher, with His divine insight, saw that it was time to expose the young man's weakness to himself. "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor."

There has been much unnecessary effort in making general application of these words. The Great Teacher taught His pupils one by one. The Great Physician treated His patients each according to his special need. He made much of the personal equation; and while this was the particular treatment called for by this young man, it is proper for us to believe that for others, he would have applied entirely different tests.

However, this test was too rigid, and we read that the young man went away sorrowful.

Then we are told that Jesus turned to His disciples, and said: "How hardly"—that is to say, with what difficulty—"shall a rich man enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Thereupon, after the Oriental fashion, saying it over again in the concrete and pictorial way, he adds: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." This saying astonished His disciples, whereupon they inquired: "Who then can be saved?" The thing to observe is, that the impression made upon their minds was not that of great difficulty, but of sheer impossibility. In reply to their question, he spoke the words of the text: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Of course, the statement of the text is to be limited by the nature of things. There are some things that even the Omnipotent God cannot do. He cannot discover a shorter distance between two given points than that described by a straight line. God cannot make two times two equal five. He cannot construct a circle, the center of which is outside of its circumference. These would be contradictions, and Jonathan Edwards said long ago that a contradiction is not a thing. The same limitations hold true in the moral world. God cannot lie, for his very nature is truth, and for the truth to lie is a contradiction between the subject and the predicate. God can not do

wrong, for his very nature is infinite righteousness. God can not commit or sanction sin, for He is Himself infinitely holy.

The thought of the text is, the things which are impossible to man are not, because of that impossibility, necessarily to be regarded as absolutely impossible; God can do them. This is suggestive of God's power in Nature all about us. It is said that there is enough potential energy stored away in a cubic foot of coal to lift a thousand pounds a foot from the surface of the earth. It is an infinitesimal bit of physical force that lifts a tiny blade of grass in the spring time, in resistance to the universal force of gravity, up from the surface of the ground; but if you multiply that by the number of blades of grass in the meadow, and the number of meadows in the valley, and on the hill slopes and mountain sides, you begin to have some conception of the silent display of physical force in the vegetable world about us. Those grand old live oaks that constitute such a characteristic feature of the California landscape, stand, with their great, brawny arms supporting tons of avoirdupois, year after year, actively but silently resisting the omnipresent force of gravity.

In 1889, I chanced to be in Paris when the Eiffel tower was completed, 987 feet high, with the flagstaff on top, 13 feet long, making an even thousand. Men passed by and exclaimed, "What an achievement of modern engineering!" And yet, if you will visit the Rockies or the Sierras, you will see those magnificent

mountain peaks, heaving their massive shoulders upward into the sky; and because we see them so constantly, we forget the mighty forces that hold them there. This magnificent architecture of the Almighty, holding hanging cliffs in mid-air, is a sublime object lesson of what men call physical force. We see it, or rather we see its effects, in the cyclone of the prairie, in the storm of the sea, and in the sweep of the stars through space.

And yet all this is nothing but what men call physical force. It cannot think a single thought. It cannot form a single resolution. There is nothing intellectual in it all. One spark of mind outshines the whole. Have you ever heard a great orator? Some one has said that this little world of our is not large enough for more than one or two real orators at the same time. You have felt the spell of a strange power that held you as its willing victim, and swayed your whole being as it would. This is a higher kind of power. There is personality in it. It strikes men with a finer touch and a greater force. It reaches the hidden well-springs of the soul. God's power is a moral power; a spiritual power. It is imperceptible in its processes and invisible in its work. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth."

This divine power is the vital element of the Christian religion. Every day it does things which are impossible for man to do. No man can stay yonder

star in its course. No man can lift that mountain from its seat and hurl it into the sea. Much less can any man redeem himself from the power of sin. It is an *impossibility*. The cause must be greater than the effect. Only God can do it. One renewed man stands for more power, or rather, shall we not say, a higher kind of power, than all the shining systems in the midnight sky. One single John B. Gough, yesterday a dissipated drunkard in the gutter, and today a Christian gentleman, preaching the gospel of temperance into the lives of his fellow men; one single Jerry McCauley or S. H. Hadley, today a prince among the reprobates of sin, and tomorrow a reclaimed trophy of the saving power of God; one single Paul, the apostle, today going up from Jerusalem to Damascus, breathing out zigzag lightnings of hatred and persecution against the early church, tomorrow rising up and tremblingly inquiring: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—and then going forth, by the grace of God, to live out the answer to his own question; one such man stands for a more magnificent display of the power of God than all the stars that have swung through space from the dawn of creation until today. This is the work of a higher kind of power. It touches men's moral sensibilities. It penetrates to their inmost soul. It lifts the level of human life and purifies the fountains of character.

Brethren, this is the basis of all our faith, and all our hope. If the power of God is not in our Christianity, then we may just as well quit our work and

throw up our hands in despair. I remember a few years ago, when Californians were disposed to laugh at the gentle earthquakes which caressed the foundations now and then, a friend of mine in San Francisco came home from his day's work at business, and while reading his paper in his library, his little boy came strutting across the room, trying to shake the very foundation of the house in which they lived. He told me that he asked his little boy what he was doing, and without a word of reply, he stepped in stately fashion across the room again. Upon repeating his question, imagine his surprise when his little boy answered, "Tryin' to det up anoder earthtwake." We may smile at Johnny's philosophy, and yet Johnny is not one whit more foolish than is the Church of Jesus Christ, if she is endeavoring to reach and remedy the evils of this world today, and to reclaim mankind from the deadly power of vice and sin and death, unless she has in it all the Almighty power of the living God. God, and not man, is at the bottom of the enterprise of redemption. He holds men's hearts in the hollow of his hand. Nations before Him are as but the dust in the balance. His hand is in all history. He sees the changes and chances, He orders the ups and downs--the ins and outs--all for the accomplishment of his own wise purpose.

"And I doubt not through the ages, one increasing purpose
runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of
the suns."

Nations are but His children; ages are but as a day

on the dial plate of God. Destiny is His creature. Rome rises, and sits in pomp and splendor upon her seven hills, and when the day of her empire is done, the Rome of the Cæsars crumbles into ruins. An Alexander conquers the world, and, according to the doubtful legend of our childhood, weeps because there are no more worlds to conquer. His work is done, and Alexander passes off the stage of action. Napoleon, the man of genius, and the man of destiny, comes from one island of the Atlantic to do his mighty work of conquest, and when his work is done, he is carried off into exile upon another lonely island of the sea. The most insignificant instruments seem to be God's favorites in doing His mighty work. Moses was the greatest military leader of antiquity. Rescued from the bullrushes, taught for forty years in the universities of Pharaoh, and then for other forty years among the lonely flocks of his heathen father-in-law in the wilderness, after these eighty years of preparation, he begins the work of the emancipation of his race.

In the coal miner's cabin on the banks of the Necker, in Germany, a child was born, a chosen child of destiny. By and by, we see the peasant's son in the monastery at Erfurt, and his eye falls upon a page of the chained Bible, on which he reads the words: "The just shall live by faith." Then was the birthday of a new era in history. God was in Luther; Luther was in Germany, and the Reformation was begun. He turns the nations as the rivers of water are turned.

Talk of difficulties in Christian work! With God nothing is impossible. Man's impossibilities are God's opportunities. Forty years ago Japan was more hostile to Christianity than China. Today, the only peril is in Japan's making haste too speedily in the direction of things western. I have no argument with a man, himself not a Christian, who says he does not believe in foreign missions. I remember how, sailing down southward on the China Sea, I looked off from the hurricane deck of my steamer and I saw those brown, barren headlands of China, with its 350,000,000 or 400,000,000 steeped in superstition and idolatry and spiritual death; a vast desert, with here and there a little oasis of Christian missionary influence. And as I hummed to myself:

"From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strands,"

I could not suppress the thought that unless God is in this enterprise, unless the dynamic of the Supernatural and the resources of the Infinite are enlisted in the movement, it is a fool's errand, at the best. Good, old John Newton was once asked whether he believed that God was able to save a heathen. His reply was a text for many a sermon. It was this: "Ever since the grace of God has saved John Newton, I have never doubted its power to save any other living man."

This thought is pertinent here at home as well. If there is any man too wicked to be saved by the grace of God, then all men are too wicked; if there is any

man too good to be saved by the grace of God, then all men are too good. The sin that paralyzes is that of doubting the infinite love, the infinite patience, the infinite, changing power of the redeeming God.

There is a lesson in this for the poorest and the weakest of us all. We are as nothing. God must be everything to us. We can do anything only by linking ourselves with God. Lord Bacon says: "We must learn to master Nature by obeying her laws." We must not use God's strength; we must let God's strength use us. His grace is able to take us, wicked and depraved and useless as we may be, and by a power greater than that which quieted the storm, remold us into his own blessed image. This is the simple lesson of faith. We open our hearts to Him. We open our lives to Him. We let Him use us for His honor and for the help of our fellowmen. These hands of ours must do His tasks; these feet of ours must walk His paths; these brains of ours must think His thoughts; these hearts of ours must respond to His love, which kindles ours; these wills of ours must merge themselves in His most holy will. This is the lesson of life. This is the core of the Gospel. This is the call of the Christ. This is the way the cross and its atonement has opened up. This is the way that gives joy, and peace, and hope, along the journey, and that leads to safety and eternal life at the end.

XIII

THE REDEMPTION OF DINAH

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XIII

THE REDEMPTION OF DINAH

"Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there."—ST. JOHN iv. 5-6.

WHY ALL this circumstantial detail? Of what interest is it that here was a parcel of ground that Jacob willed to his son Joseph, and that Jacob's well was there? In an ordinary book, such details would have little interest, and we should regard them as merely adding vividness to the picture. But the Bible is no ordinary book. It is a book inspired of God, and these details assuredly have meaning. It would seem, indeed, that the Spirit of God intended that we should search the record of Jacob's bequest to Joseph, in order that we might get before us more definitely what took place on the memorable day when "Jesus sat thus on the well."

(1) Looking into that record, we find that Jacob came into possession of that "parcel of ground" after he had returned from his long exile. It will be remembered that, having met Esau, and the danger from that quarter having passed peacefully over his head, he went on to Succoth, and there built for himself a house. This building of a house shows clearly enough that Jacob had lost all consciousness of his pilgrim character. You never read of Abraham

building for himself a house. Wherever *he* went there he pitched his "tent." Jacob, settling down among the Canaanites, buys a piece of property, and builds a house. While this was manifest failure, it is nevertheless passed over in the final account: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in the tabernacles with Isaac and *Jacob*, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. xi. 8-10.) In this final reckoning, Jacob is classed with Abraham as dwelling in a tent. The "house" he once owned is passed over in silence. Jacob did not stay long in this house, but moved away to Shechem, where he purchased "the parcel of ground" referred to in our text. There also he digged a well. In buying the ground and in digging the well, Jacob certified to the fact that he was still on the same dead level of unbelief that he manifested in building the house at Succoth. He had not yet come into consciousness of the fact that God's intention for him was that he should be "a pilgrim," and look "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." During Jacob's sojourn at Shechem, there is told out the sorrowful story of Dinah's dishonor. The fearful retribution on the Shechemites follows, and Jacob, roused out of his stupor by the awful tragedy, begins to

think of God and of the wretchedness and misery of his own condition. Conscience asserts itself properly, and, in the horror of it all, Jacob, with a new ring of resolution in his voice, says: "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." (Gen. xxxv. 2-3.) The memory of these awful days in Shechem followed Jacob until the day of his death. He never, as far as we know, visited again that "parcel of ground," nor did he ever again drink from the well. We hear no more about them until just before his death, when he bequeathed the ground and the well to his son, Joseph.

(2) Forty years pass and Jacob is now in Egypt. The long, but necessary, discipline of his life is over, and the skies are calm and serene above him, as he gathers his sons about him, in order that he may give them his last blessing. His eyes are aglow with the mystic fire of prophecy, as he blesses in succession each of his sons. Especially is this manifest when he lays his hands gently on the head of Joseph, the pre-eminent type of Christ. Listen as he bequeathes the well to Joseph: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the

hands of the mighty God of Jacob ; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel :) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee ; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb : the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills : they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren." (Gen. xlix. 22-26.) Jacob, as he utters these words—for they are the words of prophecy—looks through the long vista of the coming centuries, and the vision of the dying man is that of the scene pictured in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John. He sees the Glorious Man who shall one day sit beside the well, and there redeem the dishonor of Dinah. Thus Joseph inherits the well.

(3) "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." (Gen. xlix. 33.) And "his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre." (Gen. l. 13.) "And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house : and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation : the children also of Machir the son of Manas-

seh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." (Gen. l. 22-26.) A coffin in Egypt, but Joseph is embalmed in it to be borne away with his brethren when their bondage in Egypt is ended. "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." (Heb. xi. 22.) "By faith" Israel "passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians, essaying to do, were drowned." (Heb. xi. 29.) The body of Joseph passed through with them, and of that parcel of ground bequeathed to him in Jacob's will, Joseph takes possession in *death*. But Joseph buried there was the type of Christ, in whom he would some day take possession in resurrection.

Slowly the centuries roll round, but at last the day dawns, and Jesus "must needs go through Samaria." Joseph is about to take title in resurrection to that "parcel of ground" that Jacob gave him. "Now Jacob's well was there." "Of all the *special* localities of our Lord's life," says Stanley, "this is almost the only one absolutely undisputed." Of the water of that identical well Dinah drank. Centuries could

neither efface that landmark, nor invalidate the title of Jacob until Joseph came into his inheritance. "Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour." Jacob's faith in the redemption of his daughter is now to be vindicated. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water." The dying words of Jacob shall be now justified. "Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans?" Jesus answered and said unto her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." In answer to our Savior's words, the woman says: "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?" See how she claims *Jacob* as her father. Surely she had in her possession the Scriptures that told of Jacob's history, and when she now lays claim to Jacob as her father, would not this awaken memories within her of another who, like herself, had often drunk of that same well? On this day, if never before, as she stands in the presence of this Glorious Stranger; and claims kinship with Jacob, she will think of his daughter Dinah, whose history she is repeating in herself. Jesus saith unto her: "Who-

soever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The return to that well, in weary succession, day after day, was indeed the all-sufficient demonstration that the waters it contained could not meet the unquenchable thirst of the soul. But now is come One who has awakened within the weary-hearted woman a desire for something better than could be furnished by Jacob's well. She says simply: “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.” Gently, and yet skillfully, Jesus puts the probe into the wound that sin has made, and in such a way as to make her conscious of the awful depth of her need. When all is fully told out, and she had revealed to her the absolute holiness of God, and the immeasurable distance between Him and the lost and dying sinner, she gives expression to that which alone could effectually bridge the chasm between God and the lost ones of earth: “I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.” It is enough. Our blessed Lord, as if reaching one hand to the dying sinner and the other to the throne of God, and thereby linking the two together, says: “I that speak unto thee am He.” The blessing has prevailed unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. Joseph is in possession and Dinah is redeemed.

XIV

A CERTAIN FAITH

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XIV

A CERTAIN FAITH

"I know whom I have believed."—II. TIMOTHY i. 12.

THERE is in this the ring of certainty. It is not a "perhaps," or a "maybe," but an "I know." There is in the human heart a longing for certainty regarding spiritual things. We may have witnessed what seemed to us a perfect order of worship, praise, and speech, and then have gone away with the feeling, I have not found Him for whom my soul longeth, I have not seen God or felt His presence. If we ever reach the place where we can say, "I know," if we come to stand with Thomas and exclaim: "My Lord and my God," or stand with Mary at the open tomb, and say, "Master," or come to the heart experience of Paul and say, "I know whom I have believed," we shall not be easily disturbed by controversies, or moved by gain-sayers. Why do intelligent people love to sing such hymns as:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto me and rest. "

Or the hymn:

"O happy day, that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Savior and my God."

Or this hymn, written by a man who had been a godless sailor :

“Sun of my soul, Thou Savior dear,
It is not night, if Thou be near;
Oh, may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide Thee from Thy servant’s eyes!”

We love these hymns because they come from a heart experience, like that to which we are all called in this text of Scripture.

We are here dealing with facts, just as certainly as we deal with facts in any realm of knowledge. In an essay entitled, “The Contribution of Science to Christianity,” Henry Drummond says: “Christianity is learning from science to go back to facts The evidence for Christianity is a Christian. The unit of physics is the atom, of biology the cell, of philosophy the man, of theology the Christian.” After speaking of the natural man and his regeneration by the Spirit, he says: “There is a great experiment which is repeated every day, the evidence for which is as accessible as for any fact of science.” People may differ on minor points, but not on the great principles. When we ask for certainty we are passing away from the region of mere theory and coming into contact with reality. We ought to reach reality in things spiritual as certainly as in things material.

When Paul utters this word of certainty, he is not a young enthusiast, without knowledge or experience. He is about sixty-five years old, and the time of his departure is near at hand. He penned this sentence

in a Roman dungeon, under sentence of death. He belonged to the aristocracy of Tarsus, no mean city. He had been a member of the Sanhedrim, the highest judicial court. When one reads of his journey to Damascus, he might say, Was he carried away in a whirlwind of excitement? Such an experience will surely be followed by a violent reaction. Thirty years have gone on since that great change. Time is the great sifter of men and systems. In all this period, his course has been clear, his convictions unwavering. The certainty of Christ changed his whole life, and made the spiritual real. We must form our philosophy from facts. Here is a great fact in the life of Paul. Frederick Denison Maurice of England, was a great theologian. In early life he was a skeptic, but, later, he came into the certainty of Peter and John and Paul, and said: "I did not receive this of men, neither was I taught it. Every glimpse I have caught has come to me through great confusion and darkness." And for years he gave this testimony: "I know whom I have believed." It would not be difficult to begin with the early centuries and run down the history of the Christian church to this present day, and all along hear men out of a great experience, saying: "I know whom I have believed."

The question rightly comes, How did Paul reach this definite knowledge on a question of such supreme importance? It may be said that throughout his life he had a desire to be obedient unto God, and that obedience is an organ of spiritual knowledge. "Who-

soever doeth His will shall know of His doctrine." He was trying to win the favor of God by his own hand. In trying to do this he was ever conscious of his failure, and therefore put forth the greater effort. We are asking for what is real, and how Paul came to it. Paul would have had little concern for this knowledge of Christ had there not been something in his life, and in the life of others, that Jesus alone could meet and answer. No one speaks more emphatically than does Paul on the subject of the universality and the guilt of sin. Is sin a reality? Does he call upon us to look within and see what is there and to look without and see what is in human life? Do we follow through the centuries and see the wreck and the ruin that sin has everywhere caused? Do we see the bloodstains at the very gates of Paradise, when brother slew brother? Do we see ruin caused by avarice, and pride, and licentiousness? Does Dr. Van Dyke put it too strongly when he says: "From a thousand reeking cities goes up the pitiful cry of the children; from every land the exhalations of human wickedness and woe rise, like heavy smoke, blackening against the blue of heaven"? What are many doing with this feeling of guilt that is thus written in our history, and that each man feels in his heart? Are there those trying to deny the fact as if this were a necessity of human life, and that we would in time outgrow it? Even with the denial there is the consciousness that no human remedy has ever been found sufficient to wipe away the sense of guilt. What man has failed to

do God has done. In "The Tempest" Shakespeare has two characters who had a great affection for each other. "At the first glance they changed eyes." Joseph Cooke said at the Parliament of Religions: "The truly religious man is one who has changed eyes with God." Now, to change eyes with God, means that we must be at peace with Him, that our wills are one with His will. If to that voice within that says, "thou oughtest," we make answer, "I will," there is peace. If to that imperial voice we say, "I will not," there is discord, and confusion, and we want to hide away from God.

Paul is emphasizing the certainty of his religious life. There are some things that we know to be certain, that every man knows. I know and you know that we are not to live here always; that what we call death is coming to every man, woman and child. This will be a certainty

"When the heavens are old, and the stars are cold,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold."

The man from whom I have just quoted points out that "It is a certainty, and a strategic certainty, that, except Christianity, there is no religion under heaven, or among men, that effectively produces for the soul this joyful deliverance from the love of sin, and the guilt of it."

When we have some knowledge of sin, and its guilt, we will form some notion of God. This was the experience of Paul. At the time of his journey to Da-

mascus when his conversion occurred, he felt that he must work up to God. After the Damascus experience, he feels that God has come down to him. He sees God in seeing Jesus. He lays hold of a person. It is something more than taking hold of a particular doctrine. I may believe in some great doctrine, and go on in my usual way. I may say that I believe in the sovereignty of God, or even in the Holy Trinity, and stop with a mere intellectual conception. This conception may not touch the life of a person at all. When I say I believe in Jesus, it carries with it the idea of confidence and trust. Dr. Watson gives this statement: "One may say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ,' and when he says that, he has passed into the sphere of thought and feeling. It is as if he had said that he believed in his mother, but with a still deeper and more sacred meaning. He is dealing now, not with facts, or with doctrines, but with a person, and there is an immense difference between believing in a fact and believing in a person."

The experience of Paul is something more than knowing about God. It is knowing God. I may know about the President of the United States, having never seen him. When I say, "I know the President," it means something personal, that I have personally met him. When I can say, "I know God," it means that I have personally come in touch with Him. To know about God is said to be theology, while to know Him is religion. To say, "I know whom I have believed," is the warmth of a personal affection. This places

Jesus far and away above a mere ethical teacher, or social reformer, or healer. It makes Him something more than a leader whose work is to "innoculate men with a new enthusiasm for humanity." Christ is more than all this. He comes to deliver men from the bondage of sin. Our views of religion are determined, in large part, by our relation to Christ. From the moment that Paul saw Christ he never doubted the power of Christ, or that righteousness must come from God. If ever a man sought righteousness by the work of his own hand Paul was that man, and when it seemed to him that he was about to obtain it, "it was caught in the blaze of revelation and whirled away in shreds of shriveled blackness." When Paul looked for righteousness at his own hand, he saw the multiplication of guilt. What he had failed to do he now knows, by actual experience, that Christ can do.

This leads to the question of consciousness. What Paul knew, he knew that he knew. In consciousness there is the person who knows, there is the object that is known, there is also the knowledge that we know that we know. Brutes know, but they do not know that they know. They cannot come out of themselves, as it were, and look at themselves. When Paul said, "I know," he knew himself as knowing, he knew the object of his knowledge—Jesus.

I can go back to a little home in northwestern Ohio. Some one uses the name Mary, and I see the home again. I can see a little mother, retiring and modest, and yet bold and strong, when duty called,

with a sweet and unselfish face. There was a relation existing between the mother and sons that we do not explain, we do not try to explain. We simply know it, and know that we know it. It is a matter of consciousness. Such a relation was existing between Paul and Christ. He looked at it from many points of view and sums it all up: "I know whom I have believed."

This testimony is strengthened by his long experience. Experience does not deal with inferences. It has to do with facts. In Christ there is redemption from sin. This he has found to be true. It is a fact. He is conscious of it. He is promised eternal life, and here it is already begun. "The change is far too great and radical to be called in question. It impresses itself upon those who view it merely from the outside. The subject of it is filled and thrilled with the certainty of the transformation. To all objectors he says, like the man the Savior healed: "This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see."

At first a man may accept Jesus for some reason, or because of some testimony. "As he goes on learning, more and more, of the realities of the Christian life, creeds change into consciousness, and we can turn round to apostles and prophets, and say to them, with thankfulness for all that we have received from them: 'Now we believe, not because of your saying, but because we have seen Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Savior of the world.'"

Paul's thirty years of Christian life certainly give

him some right to speak what he knows. You prove the existence of God and discuss His nature and come, in a sense, to know Him, but that knowledge will not be like the knowledge of the heart, which says: "I know, because He has been with me." The poor soul, carrying her heavy load up the steep hill of life, says: "I know Him, because He has helped me bear my burdens, again and again." I might give an argument for the providence of God, but that argument is nothing compared with some great experience in our life, when we have felt the protecting care of God. We may sound the depths of philosophy, and we may make great excursions along the way of our reason, and perhaps will come far short of knowing God in comparison with the pure in heart who see Him.

If this is going to be helpful to me, it must be mine, it must be yours. The consciousness that Paul had ought to be ours. It is of little service that there is gold in the mine, if we need money. We must get it out of the mine and appropriate it. Men may be beggars, walking over rich treasures. Is He my redeemer? Medicine is good, but it will be of little value simply to argue and reason about it. The one thief on the cross heard Him say, "This day," the other hardened his heart, and there was no vision and no voice. Paul is in prison, under sentence of death. It would not surprise us to hear him utter some pessimistic word, sound some note of discontent. Listen! "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed

unto Him against that day." The blind lad is going home. He has been away for weeks at school. He cannot see the country, or the train, or any man. His face is all aglow with light. He believes in the man who led him to the train, and that the train is carrying him home. "Why are you so happy, my boy?" "I am going home," he says. "How do you know you are going home?" "I know it, that's all." I call upon you to meet this same Christ whom Paul met. I am not asking you to learn about Him, but to meet Him, to know Him. Do you say, I believe this, or, I believe that? The question is not, I know *what* I have believed, but I know *whom* I have believed. It is not a question of some creed, important as that is, but it is a question now of a person. An infidel was dying, and his infidelity, beginning to give way, he was rallied by his friends, who surrounded him. "Hold out," they all cried, "don't give way." "Ah," said the dying man, "I would hold out, if I had anything to hold by, but what have I?" Mr. Brown relates that at the conclusion of an evening service, in a fishing village, a young man stood up, and with great earnestness began to address his fellows. He said: "You all remember Johnny Green." There was a murmur of assent all over the gathering. "You know that he was drowned last year. I was his comrade on board our boat. As we were changing the vessel's course one night, off the Old Head of Kinsail, he was struck by the lower part of the mainsail, and swept overboard. He was a good swimmer, but had been dis-

abled by the blow, and could only struggle in the water. We all made haste to save him. Before we got seated in the punt, we heard Johnny's voice, over the waves, beyond the stern, singing the last line of his favorite hymn: 'If ever I loved Thee, My Jesus, 'tis Now.' He was drowned, but the last words which we heard from his lips assured us that he knew whom he had believed."

What we need to have now is that which we will need in the ultimate test of life. It is simply folly to say that we do not need to think about the future. We must do so whether we want to or not. We are all going hence, and it is of tremendous concern to know whether we can go in peace. When Dr. Alexander, one of the professors of theology in Princeton, was dying, he was visited by a former student. After briefly exchanging two or three questions as to health, the dying man requested the student to recite a verse of the Bible. After a moment's reflection the student repeated from memory: "I know *in* whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him unto that day." "No, no," replied the dying man, "that is not the verse. It is not I know *in* whom I have believed, but I know *whom* I have believed." He said: "I cannot allow the little word 'in' to intervene between me and my Savior today. I cannot allow the smallest word in the English language to go between me and my Savior in the floods of Jordan."

XV

CHRIST FORSAKEN UPON THE
CROSS

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XV

CHRIST FORSAKEN UPON THE CROSS

"And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*, that is to say, *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me.*"—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 46.

THE utterances of Christ upon the cross were seven in number. Beginning with the fervent prayer for his enemies: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," they closed with the trust-breathing petition: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Midway between these was heard the cry which we have chosen as the topic of our thought. That mournful crucifixion scene which began with an exhibition of the wondrous pity of Jesus, which ended in completest triumph for that love wherewith He loves sinners, witnessed also the endurance, on His part, of three hours of burdening anguish, of an anguish whose pressure at last opened the long silent lips, and forced from them the despairing moan: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "From the sixth hour," it is written, "there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried, with a loud voice, saying: "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.*" Cry of despair from amid thick darkness, moan of Jesus upon the cross, let us, with reverence, contemplate its significance.

The ground of this significance lies in the person of

the sufferer. Turn, then, and look upon Him as He hangs upon His cross of shame, the words upon His lips, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Contrast His present condition with what He had been, and what He was. He had been three and thirty years previous, a babe, cradled in a manger, it is true, but a babe welcomed to earth as babe never was, either before or since. Around His manger-cradle shepherds rejoiced, and Magi worshiped, above it angels sang, and saints adored, as saints only can. He had been for the three years immediately preceding His crucifixion the joy of the multitudes of Israel, welcomed in every corner of the land, even in Jerusalem, with gladness; for at His coming the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised up, and the poor had the Gospel preached unto them. He had been the teacher, leader, and companion, during the period of time last mentioned, of a little company of disciples, unto whom He revealed Himself as He did not unto the world, in whom He trusted He had found men worthy His exalted friendship. He had been in the hour of His baptism by John in Jordan acknowledged fully as that which He was. The record reads: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' " That which He was,

God's beloved Son, was attested not only by the voice from heaven, by the miracles done by him, but also by His life. His life, in itself, was evidence to the divineness of His being. His whole life was a life of holiness, for He knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. His whole life was a life of devotion, it was His meat and drink to do the will of the Father who is in heaven. His whole life was a life of patient submission to the divine guidance, of Him it is written, that "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Perfect was the Christ, and perfect He remained. And yet this perfect man, this beloved Son of God, this friend of the disciples, this healer of the masses, this Messiah of Israel and hope of the ends of the earth, hangs dying, one Friday afternoon, upon a cross of shame, His only steadfast companion, the believing robber at His side. The masses whom He had both taught and healed, forgetful of all that He had done for them, have left Him a helpless victim of the rage of priest and scribe. The disciples with whom He had companied as a friend, have preferred, by flight, to secure their own safety, rather than have share in the martyr-honors of their Master's cross. These, with all the blessing they would have brought in the life that now is, with all the glory they would have secured in the life that is to come, the disciples left to the lot of a poor, penitent thief. Christ was deserted in death by all whom He had benefited, all whom He had trusted. He was utterly forsaken of men!

Forsaken of men! Ah! that was not all. To be forsaken of the world—this is but the lot of many others of God's dear ones, and it can be borne. To be deserted by His disciples, that was harder to bear, for even to us undeserving, what pain comes, when, in the hour of adversity, the friends whom we had deemed true, turn faithless! To us, however, when the world becomes cold; to us when friends grow chill and own us not, to us comes the comforting divine presence, alleviating our every pain with the sweet promise: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," lighting up even the valley of the shadow of death with the glow of the hope which shines in the words: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." When all else fails we find rest in God.

Surely, the like comforting rest was accorded unto God's beloved Son! Surely, His last hours outwardly dark, were made inwardly bright with the radiant divine presence. Surely, the Father-heart of God was opened unto Him, enabling Him to declare, with prophet and apostle, martyr and saint: "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." Surely, in this hour of direst agony to the Son of Man, will the words once more be heard: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" Was it thus? Turn to the cross for answer. See about it has gathered the darkness of midnight; hear amid that darkness the anguished

cry, "My God, My God, why hast *thou* forsaken me." Forsaken of the world, forsaken of His disciples, Christ was also forsaken of God. Oh! thought of awe, the God of love abandoning the Son of His love. Why?

Some of you may have stood above the dying bed of an unrepentant sinner. But, however our experience varies in this respect, well we all know the truth, and the whole truth, in every such case. One person may pass away from life with the apathy which ignorance begets, another may yield to the king of terrors in sullen silence of obstinate physical courage, yet others may enter eternity with the wail of despair upon their lips; but of them all is it true that they are lost because of unforgiven sin, because of the guilt which rises as an impassable barrier between them and God. God cannot company with the wicked, who cling to their wickedness, in any hour, either of life or death, and they are lost, forever lost, because forsaken of the Father. With deepest reverence, let us apply this truth to the crucifixion of our Lord. That He should be numbered with the transgressors was foretold by Isaiah, the prophet. That He was for a time forsaken of God, is certified unto us by His own words. That He Himself fully realized the dread nature of such abandonment, His prayer in the garden: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," as well as the agonizing cry upon the cross, sufficiently attest. The fact confronts us, however we may shrink from it, that as Jesus hung upon the cross, He

was treated by the Eternal Father as if He were the vilest of the vile! Why? Because of what He had been? Nay. God is just, and could but rejoice in the good, unmixed with evil, which had characterized the whole life of Jesus. Because of what He was? Nay. God is love, and could take naught but delight in Him who was the express image of His person. Because of lack of power in Himself to save Himself? Nay. But five hours before, at furthest, He had plucked an immortal soul from Satan's grasp, and had cheered its dying agonies with the words: "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." What He had been, what He was, His almighty power to save, the Paradise whither His own hand would guide the penitent thief, known these all to the Christ and to the Father, in them there is no cause for the awful condition, dimly shadowed in the words, "Forsaken of God." Wherefore then was Christ forsaken of God on the cross? Brethren in the Lord, turn for answer, not to the cross, but to your own hearts; look not upon the Christ, but upon yourselves; strive once to fully realize Paul's meaning when he wrote: "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." Ah, it was for us that the Perfect One became even as the vilest of the vile. He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. He was the propitiation for our sin, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. He who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth,

bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He stood in our stead, face to face with that irrevocable divine law: "The wages of sin is death." He died, the just for the unjust. My sins and yours, these shrouded His cross with midnight darkness, these made the Almighty Helper helpless, these gave force to the mocking words of priest and scribe: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," these averted the Father's face, these were part of the mighty burden, which pressed Him down to death, and wrung from His agonizing lips, the cry: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Christ was deserted of God upon the cross because our sins, in the Father's sight, became His sins. One Friday afternoon, nearly 1900 years ago, as the eye of Divine Justice flashed earthwards with its lightning glance, it rested upon a little hillock that men called Calvary, and saw there, nailed to a splintery, bloody cross,—not Jesus in the perfection of his manhood,—not Jesus in the glory of his deity,—but us, my hearers, us in our sins and under the just condemnation of divine law, and poured forth there upon Him, our substitute, that wrath of God against sin which is even yet held in store against judgment for the impenitent, and whose dread result no words so picture as the words: "Forsaken of God."

This desertion upon the cross of the loving Son by the loving Father, is to us, in its nature, beyond comprehension. Understand why it occurred we can, for Scripture tells us plainly: "He bare our sins in His

own body on the tree.” *Comprehend* its nature, we cannot, nor ever will.

“None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night the Lord went through,
Ere He found his sheep which was lost.”

Let it then suffice that we learn from the fact of Christ’s desertion upon the cross certain practical truths.

Learn, first, the truth concerning sin. Men, in these lax days, endeavor to underestimate its heinousness, judge of it as if it were a mere mistake, not a thing evil in itself, and hateful in God’s sight. Further, they are inclined to think but lightly of it, in its influence upon human destiny. Sin, fellow-sinners, is not a mere mistake easily overlooked. Sin, even the minutest, is no light thing with God, whatever it may be with you. Sin has brought down upon us here manifold evil; what it may bring hereafter, the cross witnesses, the cross where it rose a barrier between earth and heaven, which hid from the Christ the face of God, the cross where it lay upon His soul, a burden which taxed infinite strength, and wrung from an omnipotent Savior the cry: “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” While the cross and its memory abides, there will be seen upon every human transgression, stamped, not in the thunders of Sinai, but in the blood of Jesus Christ, the divine disfavor; there will be uplifted before the eyes of all, clear warning of the sure consequence of unforgiven sin,

that death eternal which consists in eternal banishment from the divine presence. How needful, then, that ye who are Christ's resist sin even unto blood; how indispensable that ye who are not His, lay hold by faith, in this accepted hour, upon the sinlessness and omnipotence of Him who triumphed over sin upon the cross, that through Him ye may be reconciled unto the Father.

Learn, next, the truth concerning God. There are not a few persons in this generation who possess very little knowledge of the true meaning of the word father, either in a human or a divine sense. Father, to them, appears to mean one who permits his children to do as they please; who smiles at the waywardness, and is too mild to punish. We engage at this time in no argument against any such conception. We confine ourselves to the pointing out of the revelation the cross makes of the Fatherhood of God. Does it declare that God is love? Yes; strongly it emphasizes the words: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But while the cross declares that God is love, it also declares that God is just. God loved the world? Yes; but the world lay under the condemnation of the law: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." God loved the world? Yes; but His justice is equal unto His love. Punishment is no arbitrary thing, but the unavoidable effect of the cause, transgression. God could not pardon the guilty, and remain just, and while sin God will

unforgiven, salvation was impossible. How, then, became salvation possible? Let the words: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," respond. Christ took the sinner's place. Christ stood face to face, in the sinner's stead, with violated law. Against Him the sword of divine justice was raised; upon Him fell the chastisement rightfully due unto human sin. In His death divine justice was fully satisfied, and salvation was made not merely possible, but assured. Oh, cross on Calvary! Mighty is thy witness to the unchangeable love of God, but as mighty, too, thy witness to His inflexible justice. Teach thou men, as naught else can, that out of Christ there is for sinners only the sure result of their misdeeds. God, fellow-sinners, is love; yes, but He is also justice; so just is He, that salvation was impossible for you and me, until Christ died, the just for the unjust. God is a father, but no such father as some men vainly imagine. No weak Eli is He, pandering ever to the wilfulness of His children. He is inflexibly just, and vain the hope of any person, in His mercy, or His fatherhood, if he dies unrepentant. God will not spare the unrepentant and unbelieving any more than He spared not His only begotten Son as he hung upon the cross at Calvary, the sacrifice for human sin. He who smote the Christ, will not withhold from smiting the sinner who believeth not. Turn, then, now to Christ, and through faith in Him, pass forth from the

grasp of inflexible justice into the embrace of unchangeable love.

For, lastly, learn the assurance Christ hath given us in the text, of a salvation which may not be taken away from those into whose possession it has come. The words: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," are a pledge given by the Eternal God, unto those who believe in Christ that never shall they be forsaken by Him. The Father in heaven may not be just, and yet abandon those sinners for whom His Son's agonizing death has abundantly atoned. They who are Christ's are forever safe, because He stood, once for all, in their place, forsaken of God, that they might never be so forsaken. In every hour the promise is fulfilled to them. "Lo, I am with you always." Theirs is that immovable covenant, sealed with blood: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee," that covenant, so well expressed, in the thrilling lines:

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to His foes,
That soul—though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Blessed covenant, which binds our weakness to the omnipotence of the Father who is in heaven. Are we within it? Then it matters little what our earthly lot shall be, we are safe for eternity. Here there may be trial, here there may be sorrow, here friends may forsake and loved ones grow cold, but God will

be with us, and we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. God will be with us in every hour of life, and, in death, our song shall be the sweet words of the Psalmist: "I fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Saved by the sacrificial death of Christ, assured that He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come to God by Him, let our closing thought deal with the obligations which rest upon Christians. Find illustration in an incident which took place in a Southern city prior to the Civil War. Upon the auction block of a slave market stood a young woman, fair of face, graceful in form, and having about her but slight traces of African blood. She was evidently, by her bearing, a person of some degree of culture. Financial reverses of the family with which she was connected had brought her to the slave market. As she was offered for sale, bid after bid, increasing quickly in amount, was made by the rough and jeering men who stood nearest the grim auctioneer, but every bid was answered and exceeded by another bid from a distant corner of the room. At last the girl was sold to the as yet unknown purchaser. At the auctioneer's direction, the crowd gave way to give the new owner access to his slave. As he approached her the girl's eyes opened wide with astonishment, for she saw approaching her a man, in dress and manner, plainly a person of high position. He drew near the young woman, took out from his pocket a paper, handed it to

her with the words: "Here, my girl, are your manumission papers; you are free." He then turned to leave. On the instant, the young woman leapt to the ground, threw her arms about the knees of the gentleman, and cried out: "Oh, sir, I do not know you, but you have ransomed me, and I will serve you faithfully all the days of my life."

Could a slave girl feel her obligation in such manner to one who had ransomed her, then what is your obligation, you, of whom it is true that you have been "redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb, without blemish and without spot?" Is not ours the obligation to a life-long and consecrated service unto Him who died for us. May we in every hour be faithful unto Him who for our sakes was forsaken of God upon the cross. And may we carry the message of redeeming love, in His name, unto others unceasingly, that they, with us, may become partakers of "an eternal salvation."

XVI

THE TWO DOORS

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XVI

THE TWO DOORS

"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."—REVELATION iii. 8.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—REVELATION iii. 20.

AT first these two scriptures seem contradictory, for how can a door be at the same time both open and shut. But the apparent discrepancy instantly disappears when one is reminded that reference is made here, not to one and the same door, but to two doors that are wholly distinct. For there are two doors between every man's heart and the Kingdom of God. One of these God alone controls—man has nothing to do with it. For the other, only man is responsible, and, speaking with utmost reverence, God has no power either to open or close it.

These doors are variously named. The theologians speak of them, respectively, as the door of divine sovereignty and the door of human free agency. Sometimes they are called the door of redemption and the door of repentance; at other times the door of *saving grace* and the door of *saving faith*. To describe them still differently, one is the door of God's heart, through which a man passes into the Kingdom; and the other is the door of a man's heart, through which the Kingdom passes into him. One is the gateway through which Jesus comes on his way to the sinner,

and the other is the gateway through which the sinner goes on his way to Jesus.

At the beginning, these doors stood wide open; but the catastrophe which occurred in Eden, and which we speak of as the Fall, closed them both. Immediately, God began to re-open the door which He controlled and urged man by the exercise of faith and obedience to set ajar again the door for which he was responsible. As you follow the Old Testament forward, you can see God's door go back upon its hinges. Slowly through the period of the lawgiver, the judges, the kings, and the prophets, it is opening, until when Jesus comes He puts His great, strong shoulder against it, and pushes it wide open, and, then, as if tearing out the very tendons of His heart with which to do it, He ties it back securely so that it can never close again. Whereupon, standing before the world, and pointing through the door, this is His word to our fallen, sin-cursed race: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it." That is the native condition of God's door.

But how different the natural condition of the door which man controls. "Dead in trespasses and sins"—a lock tightly fastening it. "The carnal mind is enmity against God"—a bar stretching across the inside of the door holding it to. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life"—a great spike driven in to hold it closed. This is what we see when we examine the inside of man's door, and when Jesus seeks entrance thereat, He must knock, call aloud,

patiently entreat, and beg to be let in. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me."

Jesus showed John, on Patmos, a picture of each of these doors, and bade him pass them on to the churches. I want at this time to drop them down before you, and ask you to study them as closely and carefully as you would two companion pictures by some great artist in one of our galleries.

Notice, however, before we examine them separately, that Jesus relates himself differently to these doors. In the first, He is represented as standing beside it, pointing through; in the other, He pictures Himself as standing in front of the door, knocking, calling, pleading for entrance.

Now, fasten your gaze, please, upon the first picture. You can fairly see the Master's index finger pointing through. As you listen you will hear Him say:

(1) Yonder through that door which I have opened and no man can shut, is *the realm of peace*. Peace? Why, that is what all men, without exception, are seeking, and without which they are restless and unsatisfied—inner tranquillity and calm, instead of strife and tumult of soul. And when one actually finds it, he prizes it more highly than anything else in life. Like that aged, rich man, recently converted in our own church, who, after he had made his confession and received baptism, declared that no experience of

all the years was half so blessed as the sense of pardon and joy that then filled his soul.

“If peace be in the heart—

The wildest winter storm is full of beauty,
The midnight's lightning flash but shows the path of duty,
Each living creature tells some new and joyous story,
The very trees and stones all catch a ray of glory,
If peace be in the heart.”

Jesus says, go through yonder door, and that peace shall be yours.

(2) Listen again, and this farther word shall fall like music upon your ears: *Through this door is the dominion of purity.* You have all had, doubtless, in your own way, the experience which came to me some time ago, when I was conducting the funeral of a little babe, the only child of its young parents. As I approached the white casket and looked into that face of innocency, it seemed to taunt me with my own foulness of heart, and I could scarcely get the words of the service to come—“earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” but it seemed as if I must change the committal into a confessional and say, instead: “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus says, go through yonder door which I have opened, and absolute innocence shall be yours.

(3) Again His still small voice speaks, as we follow His index finger, saying: *straight through that door is the Kingdom of power.* Ah! that is what you and I are most needing—power! Our ideals are all right, but we can't attain them. If we could only be what we want and plan to be, what saints we should all

make; but weakness, inability, impotence is our trouble. Jesus says, go through that door and you shall have the needed and coveted power.

(4) And yet again He speaks. It is the still small voice He is using, and we shall have to listen intently to hear it: "Yonder through the door of grace and love lies the *domain of possibility*. There you will not only be what you want to be, but do what you want to do. Attainment, achievement, capability, those enjoy who pass into the good estate of my salvation. There souls are emancipated—set free. There men find their deeper, truer selves. There latent faculties are awakened and given a development nowhere else possible. All this shall be yours, if you will only pass through the door I have opened and no man can close.

Peace, purity, power, possibility—what inestimable boons! With these on the other side of the door, one would suppose that men would rush through, and nothing could keep them back. But they don't. Instead, they must be coaxed, almost pushed through, and why?

I will tell you in an illustration. The first time I was in Europe, I crossed over the Simplon Pass. There was no tunnel through the mountain then. Starting in the morning at Brique, down in the valley, we climbed in a stage-coach, by zigzag courses, up the side of the great mountain, but even toward the top, we were never out of sight of a peasant's hut. Way up on the cold, bleak cliffs and knolls some Switzers was trying to extract a living from the soil. "How

do these people manage to live?" I asked my driver, and he quickly replied: "Well, it isn't living. They raise a little during the summer and go down into the valley when winter comes, just to keep soul and body together, and then come back the next summer to go through the same dull round again." The driver had no more than said it than we had crossed the summit, and were on the Italian side of the mountain. First, came the tropical plants, then the tropical flowers, and later the tropical fruits. Everything was beauty and bloom and luxuriance, and I could not keep from saying to my driver: "Why don't those poor Switzers, some fine morning, just pick up their things and trudge over the mountain? They live on the wrong side of it." Why don't they? We all know. Tradition, association, habit, the inertia of the years, locks them to the cold and barren slope. Why don't men hasten through God's open door into the sunshine and luxuriance of His love? For the self-same reason. There is something within holding them back. They are not free to take advantage of God's gracious offers. They are bound, hindered, as good as imprisoned.

Now, we are ready for the second picture, and will you lift your eyes from the first and rest them upon this. It is a shut door in man that keeps him from passing out through the door God has opened into spiritual life and liberty, and so long as the door man controls is closed the other, to all intents and purposes, could as well be, for while that stays shut there

can be no passage through the first. And so Jesus pictures Himself as standing before man's closed door, knocking, calling, entreating for admission. The hinges of that door are the pivots upon which the whole question of a man's salvation turns. It must be got open, or the other might as well go closed.

What is that shut door? It is the *mind's door*, suggests some one; but he is mistaken, sadly mistaken. There are no mind-doors closed to Jesus of Nazareth these days. He is everywhere respected, admired and believed. Nothing is more inspiring than the universal popularity of Jesus in this age.

Another replies that it is the *heart's door*, but I differ with him, also. No hearts are closed to Jesus anywhere in Christendom. Of course, I here mean by the heart, the seat of the emotions. When the Bible refers to the natural human heart as closed to God, it is speaking of the entire religious nature. But, as a rule, man's affections stand wide open to Jesus. As I once heard John McNeill, the Scotch preacher, say, in his characteristic fashion: "O' mon, if you'd only let your heart go, it would toddle off of itself to Jesus." And so it would. Let a man come anywhere near Jesus Christ, and He will put a pull upon that man's heart which nothing can resist.

No, it is neither the mind's door, nor the door of the heart. What door, then, is it? It is the will's door. Oh, this human will of ours—what a mysterious, contradictory thing it is! It is the center and citadel of my being, and what goes on there determines

my character, my conduct, my very life. Here is a drunkard, who comes to me the first of January and tells me that he has turned over a new leaf, and is not going to drink any more. He goes to business the first of January, and manages to get by the saloons he has to pass on the way, but coming back at night his will fails him, and he turns into the first one he comes to, and falls ingloriously. The next day he comes to me, completely broken and crushed, and I tell him he made a mistake in trying to fight alone; he should have taken Jesus Christ into the struggle with him. And the weak will that could not hold out for a day, resists God and holds him stoutly back. The human will is the only thing in all the universe that has the power to limit God and the impenitent man's limitation of the Almighty is complete. God has His way with the planets, the oceans and the forests, with all the other orders of creation, but He can do with man only what man permits him to do. This is the door which Jesus finds closed, and it is tightly closed. He cannot force an entrance. He must stand powerless before it until man bids him enter.

Now, with these two pictures hanging before you, and while your eyes are resting upon them, I would divide this audience into three sections. Where the dividing lines will run I do not know. But you will know whether they shut you in or leave you out.

The first class is made up of those whose door is easily opened. Their wills have not yet become set. They are not confirmed in their resistance. All they

have to do is to command their wills and they instantly obey. "Go tell all the young people to whom you minister," said an old man who, after a great struggle, resolved to join the church at eighty years of age, "how easy it is at first to say 'Yes' to Jesus, but how hard it steadily becomes when once youth is past." My young friends, that is a solemn charge which I must fulfil. Open your wills to Jesus before the hinges begin to get rusty, and the fastenings of the door multiply. One word spoken by your will now will cause the door to fly open.

A second group of people before me have been supposing for years that the door was opened, when in reality it has been closed. They have set a door within ajar, but it was not the right one. Jesus has been admitted to the vestibule, but all the interior chambers of their being have been shut to Him. Go through with a candle and see if that be not so. No, let Jesus take the candle; He will not blow it out as you would do when something wrong came into sight. Here is the *council room*, where you make your plans and work out your daily program. Is the door into it open? No; the rays of the candle, which strike up against it, show it to be closed. Think of it, you a Christian, and Jesus having no part in planning your life!

And, now, we are in front of the *treasure room*, where you keep that which you value and prize. Not riches, necessarily, but your reputation, your social standing, your pride, your personal comfort and dig-

nity, anything that you account dear unto yourself. Alas, alas, you had not realized it, perhaps, but the door leading thither is also closed.

How about the *altar room* of your being? Have you opened that? Come with the candle, Lord, and let us see. No; there is a heavy black door here that we come against. Your purposes, your ambitions, your aims in life, your principles, your aspirations, Jesus does not shape or sway as He should, or as He would if He were supreme there.

And last of all, we come to the *throne room*, the Holy of Holies of your spiritual being, where your life is ruled and commanded. Who sits upon the throne there? Not Jesus, for the door leading into this room keeps Him out. No; self sits there and wields the scepter. Do you wonder, Christian, with Jesus barred out of so much of your life, that He so little controls your life?

A family near our church awoke one morning to find scarlet fever in their home. It took the two oldest children in less than a week, and the parents went to the cemetery and laid the little bodies away. That afternoon, when they returned they found the agents of the health board waiting to fumigate the house. "Everything will depend upon you, madam," they said. "We want to do thorough work and we therefore ask you to open up to us every room and even every cupboard in the house." She opened everything but the storeroom, up under the skylight on the third floor, where she kept her neatly wrapped

and carefully protected packages. It had been closed during the children's sickness; what was the use of disturbing that? And the agents went away without touching it. One day, shortly after this, she had occasion to go for one of the packages stored there, and the only remaining little one came toddling in after her. In a minute the mischief had been done. A fortnight more and she was riding out to the cemetery behind its little lifeless form. She had failed to open only one little room up at the top of the house, but it was as serious as if she had not opened any. Christian, you can, by keeping one interior door closed to Jesus, wreck your whole religious life. How far has the Master full entry into your life?

The third section! It is not so large as either of the others, probably, but there are some of this class in every audience—those who have been through many revivals and come out unmoved, or those who have been repeatedly moved, but each time have refused to yield, the result being that the door has been gradually fastened tighter and tighter, until the man behind it feels himself powerless to open it. The inside of his soul must resemble the door of some flats I have seen, where the tenants, to increase their safety, have added bolt to lock, and bar to bolt, until it would seem that nothing could break the door through. I have tried it, says such an one, again and again have I tried it, and failed. There is no use in my going through the motions again. That has been your difficulty, my friend, it has been only going through

the motions. You have stopped with the opening of the outer door, and, of course, Jesus has not entered your life. Throw open the will-door, or, if that seems impossible, will to do it; be willing to have it opened, and the Holy Spirit, who can pass through closed doors and windows, will lend you His aid, and help you to push back the bolts, turn the locks, and remove the bars, and make the opening of the door possible.

Oh, friends, whichever section you find yourself in, give up your wills to Christ, admit Him to the citadel of your being, and, entering, He will take your deeper, better, larger self, lead it out through the door which you have opened, and then through the door He has opened and no man can shut, into His peace, into His purity, into His power, and into unbounded spiritual possibility.

XVII

WAGES OR A GIFT

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XVII

WAGES OR A GIFT

“The wages of sin is death.”—ROMANS vi. 23.

THESE are striking, if not startling, words. Are you so familiar with them that they neither strike nor startle? I read in your hearing part of the second and the third chapters of the book of Genesis, not to bring out a contrast, but the similarity between the teaching in the first part of the Bible concerning sin, and the teaching in the latter part of the Bible. God says, in that second chapter: “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” This is the direct statement of a fact. Now, turn over until you come to that wonderful Epistle to the Romans, written by the great apostle to the Gentiles, the man of culture and of wide experience, and you find that in spite of all the development in the human race as revealed in the Bible, there is no development concerning sin. The teaching about sin is the same. God said: “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”; Paul said, using a figure of speech instead of a direct statement: “The wages of sin is death.” Now, we would naturally expect development in the revelation concerning sin as concerning other things. Men had kept on growing worse, until at the time Paul wrote, the world was corrupt, as never before. Sin, however,

is such a self-evident thing that when God made His first statement about it, He told the whole story and He never was able to add anything thereunto. And yet, sin is so subtle and complex in its operations that men are still mystified by it, and the teaching is being constantly simplified, and yet it continues to destroy our race. Even at the first God's statement is direct, instead of abstract, but Paul takes the other method of teaching; he wishes to bring home the truth in a new way with convincing power to his hearers so that it may not be simply a repetition of the old fact. He uses a figure of speech to doubly emphasize the truth God had sought to impress on man from the first.

The first difficulty with our race began right there. They had not ears to hear God's teaching concerning sin. Men are constantly misunderstanding the preacher, and they carry away such miserable scraps and misconceptions of sermons into the world that often it is disheartening. In my last ministry, there were several persons who always carried a report of my sermons to the hotels. But, oh, how they would misrepresent me. One day, from the pulpit, I said: "I am very thankful to the unknown persons that repeat my sermons in the hotels; it is a good place to preach them, but I do wish you would repeat them accurately." In spite of my asking, even this was garbled and the hotel proprietors were very angry. My friends *would* misrepresent me. I used to feel hurt about it, for it seemed to me that surely the truth was made plain enough for any sincere man to

carry direct and repeat as delivered. But, when I turned to the first of Genesis, I found that God preached a sermon of four words: "Thou shalt surely die," and it was misinterpreted. Satan asked: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" and the woman replied: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." "Is God to deprive you of the fruit from the best tree in the garden? That is preposterous, it is a curtailing of your liberties and places a limitation upon your development. Why are you not to eat of that tree?" "We are not to eat of it, *lest* we die." *Lest* we die, Eve says, but God said, "Thou shalt *surely* die." "No, no," Satan replied, "you have fallen into grievous error—ye shall not surely die." Catch the true meaning, in the fruit of that tree there is food and pleasure and wisdom, and what more do you need? Without that tree you are poor and miserable and ignorant; with it you are already rich, and happy, and wise. The change seemed slight in the statement, only a little word of three letters interjected, but it seemed to throw light and life into the Garden of Eden. But, oh, the pathos of it all! For in that seemingly insignificant change there was the substitution of falsehood for truth, of darkness for light, of sorrow for joy, of ignorance for wisdom, of death for life. Every tragedy in human experience, from the murder of Cain to the crucifixion

of Christ, and from His crucifixion to His second coming, was embraced in that change. There are no little things with God. The woman said, "Lest we die," Satan said, "Not die," but God said, "Ye shall surely die," and the truth of God's statement has been verified a thousandfold in all ages every moment since. Nevertheless this misrepresentation holds firmly today, and men are still hearing God, as the woman heard, and heeding the interpretation of Satan.

Now, turn to my text, and you will find Paul's figure throws light upon this subject. He says: "The wages of sin is death," or rather: "The rations, or provisions, of sin is death"—that is the accurate translation of his word; it may, however, stand for the money which buys provisions and is used of supplies for an army, and as wages purchase food, so we get the idea clearly when we say: "The wages of sin is death." Paul claims that sin is a master, a king, an autocrat: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin," and as a servant, Sin gives him his wages—his rations. The sinner, therefore, works for his keep. You have heard of a boy agreeing with a farmer to work for his board and go to school. Whenever you begin to serve Satan, he gives you your keep, he will feed you, feed you on death—fine food that for one created in the image of God!

Let us now see how sin secures his servants. Those who serve for such wages ought to be hard to find. But are they? Sin is a master of wonderful astute-

ness. His manner is deferential and winsome. His method the most approved in reaching and catching each individual case. He still uses the tricks exhibited in Eden, and comes enticingly with beautiful words, and presents himself in all the entrancement of his powers. No man ever wooed fair maid with the persistency sin woos every man that cometh into the world. There is nothing too good to promise and every hope he guarantees to fulfil. Therefore, we sin because it seems an assurance of the best and is a delight and a pleasure. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Was it in the marriage settlement God made between them that Adam should obey the woman? Nay, nay; sin so entranced and manifested his powers that he reached the man through his God-given helpmeet. In the recognition of the tree's threefold attractiveness, she was caught by sin, and her enthusiasm easily caught the husband. In spite of all the experience from Adam down, man still believes that to sin will make him strong, and happy, and wise. Listen to the arguments on the streets of our cities, daily, or at the corner grocery in the country: "What a fool is the clean, pure, young man! What a weakling he is, still tied to his mother's apron strings! How much he's missing! What's the use of living, if you can't have a *good time*? He's nothing but a baby, anyway!

Does not know, and never will know anything!" Yes, the clean, pure, young man, whose "strength is as the strength of ten," may run faster, jump higher, throw farther than any other fellow, but he is a weakling still, to many. He has a clear, clean, open, countenance, with bright eyes and the happiest of faces, and yet he is still, to many, *missing all the fun*. He may surpass all the others in knowledge, wit and wisdom, but, to many, he is only an ignoramus. Yes, sin still knows how to make falsehood more attractive than truth. Let me illustrate this, by reminding you of a story written by Charles G. D. Roberts. The scene of the story is laid in the northeast, at the headwaters of the St. John River, right at the lakes, near the dividing line between the United States and Canada. It narrated the capture of a great eagle. This eagle occasionally found his food at the edge of the lake when the fish came into the shallow water. One morning he found in the place where he was accustomed to eat his breakfast a great stone. His suspicion was aroused; he flew around and carefully examined the stone from every side. Finally, he perched on the tall stump of an old tree and scrutinized everything with patient care. The stone never moved, and not a hint of danger could he discover. While thus examining everything, he noticed more fish there than he had ever seen before, and he grew very hungry; so down he went, picked up a fish, hopped on the stone and made a good breakfast. Then he did his duty by his brood, and carried some to his aerie. He did this

for several days, and life was rich and easy, as never before. Finally, one day, when he came, he found a stick laid across the stone, in a slanting position, with something hanging loosely to the upper end. Again his suspicions were aroused, and another examination in the same careful manner followed. But he finally ate his breakfast on the stone, with the stick hanging over his head. This he did the next day, and the next, until, at last, he would come down with absolute carelessness, hop on the stone and enjoy his meal. But, one day, as he was in the full enjoyment of his morning meal, the Indian, hidden in the reeds, pulled two strings, dropping the stick and unloosing the meshes of the net around the eagle, and no sooner was he caught in that net, than a horse blanket was thrown over him, and he was thrust into a bag, carried to Edmunston, and sold to a Yankee for fifty dollars. Young man, let me ask you, when was the eagle caught? O, you say, he was caught the minute the Indian pulled the strings and the meshes of the net entangled him: Not a bit of it—he was caught the first day he ate his breakfast on that stone. That is when he was caught. And we are caught, not only in the sin of our father, but we were caught in very truth and sold to Satan for nothing but the wages of sin, which is death, on the first occasion we yielded to the lust of sin.

Again, notice. Sin is not satisfied simply to hold us captives. “All that a man hath,” said Satan,” will he give for his life,” but the servant of sin gives all, *life*

included, for his master. When I was a lad, living in the country, we had a couple of splendid bay horses. Oh, they were beauties! How I did rejoice in them! They were the pride of my young heart, not simply because of their beauty, but because of their swiftness. There was not a horse in all that country could pass them on the road. I was not a preacher then, and so could drive as fast as they were able to go, without any one thinking it strange. During the summer, at times, we would turn them out to pasture, and the growing grass seemed very luscious to them. When it was necessary to bring them in, I have stood at the gate, rubbing my palms together enticingly and calling. I would speak to them with sweet and bewitching words of man's wisdom—but, you can't catch a horse that way—he has too much horse sense. Then, sometimes, I have taken my old hat and with pebbles in it, have gone into the field, shaking the pebbles, and speaking more enticing words, but they would simply laugh and jeer at me, kicking up their heels. No, you can't catch a horse with a hat, and pebbles, and words. They could always be caught, however, with a tin dish of oats. All I needed to do was to stand at the gate, rattling the oats, and it made no difference where they were, they would run to me. Then I would let them touch their moist lips to the grains, so they were absolutely sure they were oats, when they would follow me with such eagerness that I was in danger of being stepped on. I had discovered their secret, and in the stable I would put a little in this stall and a little in

the other, and so they were caught. Isn't that exactly what sin does to us? He finds out the thing that is sweet to our soul and he lets it do the speaking, and we run after him oftentimes just like those beautiful bays used to run after me. But, when the horses were in the stable, what did I do? I put the harness, with a bit and bridle, on them, and then hitched them to my buggy. True, true, but what then? When another young man wanted to pass me on the road, do you suppose I ran ahead with oats in a dish enticing my bays? Nay, verily, I sat on the driver's seat, with the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, and they went whithersoever I listed, for they were completely in my power. What a picture of sin when he has caught us! He sits in the driver's seat, with the reins of desire in one hand and the whip of passion in the other, and drives us in his ways! Who has not been driven under the whip of Satan and felt the bitterness of death in his heart? Sin is a hard master and he drives terribly, feeding us, meanwhile, upon the rations of sin, which is death. You have seen, as I have, men who, with tears rolling down their faces, would say: "I tell you, I would break loose from sin this very minute, but I am powerless in its grasp." Too true, too true; for no man ever gave himself to sin in the least iota, that had power of himself to break away from it. Yes, I have known men to give up a particular sin for a time, and perhaps forever, but that is sin's way of turning a man out to pasture, that eventually he may be bound to his service as never before.

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house, from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Again, our text is worth looking at to learn *when* we are to draw our wages. You say: “I am going some time to give up my sin and be a Christian. I want to go to Heaven when I die. I have loved ones over there, and that is the place to spend eternity.” Oh, look at this text closely. It says: “The wages of sin *is* death.” It does not say, the wages of sin ought to be, may be, will be, but *is*—*is* death. Notice the present tense—it means just what it says. It isn’t, then, a question of the future. It is of the present. Now, you know what it is to sin. “Oh,” you say, “I am not very bad; I never did anything very bad.” Do you know anything about sin? Is sin lodged in your heart? Are you able to understand what it is to be a sinner? This text does not say: “The wages of drunkenness is death—the wages of the libertine is death—the wages of the murderer is death”—it says: “The wages of *sin* is death.” Did you ever sin? If so, then step right up here and get your wages, for “the wages of sin *is* death.” Ah, but you say, “what is sin?” The catechism says: “Sin is any want of

conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." You say: "I have never transgressed God's law." Very well. Have you failed to conform—failed in conformity thereunto? If so, step up and get your wages, for "the wages of sin is death." The Bible says that all unrighteousness is sin. Have you ever done an unrighteous thing? thought an unrighteous thought? felt an unrighteous feeling? Step up and get your wages, for "the wages of sin is death." The Bible says the thought of foolishness is sin. Did you ever have a foolish thought? Step up and get your wages, for "the wages of sin is death." "No thank you," you say, "I will not step up and get my wages." Yet, "We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and while you may say, "I will not step up and get my wages," you have gotten them already. You have been drawing your wages, even although ignorant that you were being paid. Satan does not wait. He does not pay at the end of a life, he does not wait until the end of the year, nor the end of a month, or a week, or even a day. There are men who pay in that way, but sin pays by the job, whenever you do the service, the very minute that sin claims your heart, you are not only retained in his service, but immediately draw your wages.

Then what is the wages of sin? "The wages of sin is death"—*is death*—not, "will be death," but *is death*. If you are an impenitent sinner, you are in the grip of death now, just as sure as you will be at the end of

life. This is not pleasant news. You say, "I don't believe it." Don't believe it? It was not believed at the first. It was not believed when Paul repeated it to the Romans. The natural man never has believed it. But when you say you don't believe it, does that, in the least, alter the fact? You may be splendidly respectable, and have lived a life nobody ever found a mark upon, but if you have not found Jesus Christ, you are a sinner. This is not my teaching—it is the straight word of the living God. It does not make any difference what your profession is, if you have not found life in Jesus Christ, you are dead, for "the wages of sin is death." You say: "I don't feel dead." Did you ever hear of an undertaker in the house of mourning, going into the silent room to ask the body whether or not it was dead? No, it is not customary, nor necessary, to question the lifeless. The physician passes upon that, and the Great Physician has passed on the sinner's case, and pronounced him dead, for "the wages of sin is *death*." You are then not an authority on this question of your own death. When wife and I were married and started housekeeping, we had for a cook a very efficient and faithful colored woman who, for a long time, was a great comfort to us. One day my wife went into the kitchen, and, if she had not known that old Sally was a good woman, she would have been convinced she was drunk, for she lay on the floor, half leaning against the wall, uttering strange and incomprehensible sounds. "Something is wrong with Sally!" she cried, as she ran into the

study. Out I went, put my face down close to Sally's and gathered from the incoherent sounds she uttered that if she were only on her feet she would be all right. Sally was not as light then as she had been in former days, but I put my arms under hers behind and lifted her up, saying: "There you are, Sally; are you all right now? Stand up!" But as soon as I had raised her up, she fell back against me so heavily that I exclaimed: "Quick, wife, push a chair under her, or we will both be on the floor!" We finally managed to get her to her room, and employed two women to look after her. Twice one of the women failed in her trust and came out of the room, and each time, upon returning, she found Sally on the floor by the bed. "Nothing wrong with me," she mumbled, incoherently. "Let me up to do my work!" And yet, Sally was paralyzed clear down the whole right side of her body, from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot. The believing, and saying, and insisting, did not alter the case one iota, and that paralysis gripped our faithful old servant until it encompassed her body in death. It is the same with the sinner when the paralysis of death grips him; it is only a matter of time till it will claim the whole man. How is it with you? "That is all very well," you say, "but even if that were true, the way I feel, there is no danger for me." Why? Because, as I look at myself, I am not nearly as bad as some professing Christians. They do things I would never dream of doing"—a great many of us are comparing ourselves with ourselves—but what does that

help us, for the Word is not: "The wages of the man who is worse than I am, is death," but "The wages of *sin* is death." "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

Notice again! There are some sins we need never fear! Already we are afraid of and abhor them. There are some sins that no man on earth, no demon from hell, no angel from Heaven, could ever tempt us to commit. One day, a few years ago, at Oxford, Pennsylvania, one of our members said: "Our man caught a six-foot blacksnake the other morning. I thought perhaps the children would like to see it, so if you are up that way, and have the children with you, take them in and he will show it to them." So one evening, when it was nearly dark, and we were driving past, I said: "Let us go in and see the blacksnake." We drove in, and I jumped out and went up to the man and said: "We would like to see your blacksnake." "Walk right this way," said he, starting down stairs to a cellar. We did so, I ahead and the children at my heels. I thought we would see the snake carefully enclosed in a strong box, but just as my eyes were beginning to get accustomed to the semi-darkness, all at once I discovered the blacksnake in the man's hands, with a foot and a half of the end the head was on waving in the air. "You ought to have seen me get out of that place! Dignity? What did

I care for dignity! I was afraid of that snake. The children said to me: "What is the matter, father?" And I shouted: "Get out of this place, quickly!" And out we got. The children did not seem to be frightened, and the man said in the most soothing accents: "Don't be afraid—it won't hurt you." "Indeed, it will never hurt me; I will keep out of its reach!" A blacksnake can have all the room he wants, so far as I am concerned. There are sins like that blacksnake to me. The sin I need to be afraid of is that enticingly beautiful sin, that is so attractive to me that it draws me as a magnet steel. The sin we long to keep in the secret place, sacred from all the world, look out for it! That is the sin we need to fear.

You may say, however: "My sin is so little, just a dear, little sin; it would never bring death to anybody. And yet the Word says, the wages of your dear, little sin is death. Supposing I had a roughness on the end of my little finger, and I should go to my physician, and say: "See, there is a little roughness on the end of my finger; I have tried to get rid of it, but it stays there just the same. I wish you would give me something to remove the roughness and bring the skin back to its old condition." Then he examines it, takes some of the rough skin and carefully scrutinizes it under his microscope. Then again looks at the finger, and finally says: "The only way I can cure it is to amputate the finger." I exclaim: "That is the great difficulty with some doctors; they are all the time looking for an excuse to use the knife. I will not let

you cut off my finger for a little roughness in the skin. It does not hurt me, and it does not inconvenience me much." The doctor says: "Listen; the reason it does not hurt you is because already that little thing has killed the nerve, and unless your finger is amputated it will do the same thing for your hand, then for your arm, and at last take your life." Now, he takes a pin and pushes it into the end of my finger. "Does it hurt?" "Not at all." I say there is nothing the matter, the doctor says the nerve is killed. Which is right? And you, with your little sin, holding its place and power in your life—men and women, you are in the grip of death. Your spiritual nerve has already been killed. Are you in the grip of any sin, great or small? Then you are the servant of that sin, and you are drawing the wages of sin, which is death.

Furthermore, remember that you have no power by yourself alone to break away or deliver yourself from sin. Oh, how strong and cruel it is! Is there, then, no hope, no help, no delivery? Yes, yes; listen to the message: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Which will you have now, the gift or the wages? Will you receive the gift now? It is yours for the accepting. Jesus Christ came into this world that He might take your wages and present you with the gift. You cannot earn it. You can never be worthy of it. Yet accept it now, for He offers it freely to every sinner. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree that

we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." Give your wages to Him, and take the gift from His blessed hand. "What is the use?" you cry. "Sin has caught me and I will be held in its grip forever!" Thank God, with Christ others have been delivered and so may you!

"He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me."

When I was a lad, I used to play with my father: slapping my hand into his, "You can't catch me," and so we would go on playing, until finally, when he got my hand in the proper place, I was a prisoner. I would then try with my other hand to push back his fingers, and they would seem to yield to my strength. Until finally, in the very exultation of the assurance of getting free, I would push my fingers in and under, trying to throw his back, when snap went his hand, and both mine were caught. That was playing with my dear father, yet it is the way Satan plays with us. He leads us to play with him, and we think he cannot catch us, but he catches us, and when he has caught us, we think we can break loose, and so we make a strenuous effort to get loose, but Satan only gives us a chance, seemingly to get loose, that he may tighten his hold on us. Once, when I came back from the university on my vacation, I found my little brother playing the same game with my father. I said: "You will be caught, Buddy." He replied: "Can't catch me."

“He used to catch *me*; take warning, he will catch *you*.” The little chap only laughed at me and played on till down came father’s grip over his hand. “Oh, Buddy, don’t risk the other hand!” I cried. But, there comes the other hand, down grip the fingers and both hands are caught. What think you did he then do? Quickly he turns and shouts: “Big brother, help me; set me free,” and the big brother, fresh from the athletic contests in the university, laid his hands on the big hands and sets the little brother free. Thank God for a Big Brother who is able to deliver us, for He hath wrestled with the strong one and overcome him. Lift up your heart and cry: “Big Brother, Jesus, Thou Son of God, help me; set me free!” and no sooner do you cry, trusting in Him, than you *are* free. Are you free tonight? Or are you in Satan’s grip? Quietly pray now: “Set me free, Lord,” and those who came here in bondage of sin and feeding on death, may go out in the liberty of Christ, with the gift of God in your heart. “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Act at once and this will be the crowning hour of your life. Thanks be to God: “The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal *life* through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

XVIII

THE SECOND SON

EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, D.D.

Fourth Presbyterian Church
New York

XVIII

THE SECOND SON

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not."—ST. MATTHEW xxi. 28-30.

THE late Lord Tennyson, according to his son's statement, in the latest edition of "In Memoriam," had a profound admiration for the Sermon on the Mount and for the parables of Jesus. But our Lord's parables appeal not alone to the heart of a poet, but with even greater force to the heart of the average man. And this is because they are like clear pools in which the life of humanity is reflected.

And yet this suggests what is the real trouble that men have with Jesus Christ. It is because He is the Lord of Reality, telling us the truth about ourselves, that men in their hearts object to Him. A kindlier, more tender-hearted Teacher this world has never had. Yet He was equally frank; outspoken and positive. He knew that men do not thrive on anything less than the truth, and therefore he told them the truth about themselves. He is the Lord of Reality, and in His presence everything that savors of mere sentimentality shrivels into dry husks. If you would only let this Master of Reality tell you the truth about yourself, about your need, about your sin, about your danger, He would do you good forever.

It is in His parables, especially, that Jesus uses a sword with two edges. Here, for instance, was a company of priests and elders, representative religionists of the day, who came with their quibbles, and their objections. And this Master of Assemblies understood them fully, just as he understands every one of us. He knew that though they made a show of religiousness, they were really disobedient children. They pretended to be ready to do the Father's will, but as a matter of fact they were mere sentimentalists. Quite religious in sentiment, but rebellious in action.

It was to help them to see themselves in the light in which He saw them that Jesus related this parable of the two sons and the vineyard. How swiftly he paints the picture. "A certain man had two sons." They stand before us on the instant. How often is it true of the family that there are two sons, but with a great difference between them. Alike in their parentage, and their environment, but how unlike in their character. Jesus is touching a tender place in human experience. "A certain man had two sons."

Now, see what follows, as the Master's unerring imagination brings the scene before us. Something awakens our interest and solicitude at once. We are anxious about these sons. We find ourselves sympathizing with the father, as he goes first to one son and then to another with his earnest request, "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

If you are a father, you know that it is hard to

mingle tenderness with authority. But this father must have done so, for we catch the tender solicitude of the father beneath the form of command. It is so with God our Father. He has the authority to command, and yet you will always notice an infinite tenderness in his commands. Some of us here today would melt into penitence if this tender note of God's commands should but strike in upon our hearts. God grant that it may!

Look a moment at the two sons. The first is sullen and dark and obdurate, and his answer is harsh and stubborn—"I will not." But suddenly as you follow him, pained to witness his sorrowful rebellion, you notice that a strange change is coming over him. The dark look leaves his face, a new light creeps over his countenance, and a new tenderness seems to envelop him. Look you! He is turning into the way of the vineyard, he is standing at the gate, he has entered and is throwing off his cloak, and is tightening his girdle and going to work in the vineyard. "Afterward he repented and went."

We are looking for some such change here in this hour. Some one who has said, "I will not," will turn suddenly in the other direction, and draw near to the vineyard. The hour is momentous for this reason. No change that ever comes over life is equal to this change, from darkness to light, from rebellion to obedience, from stubbornness to melting tenderness. Our Lord put it into a single sentence: "Afterward he repented and went." It requires no long time to

repent. You can do it now, in this very hour. And when repentance begins you will wish to find the way at once to the vineyard of your Lord.

A gentleman who is widely known as a publisher of religious literature related to me the story of his conversion. In early life he was a skeptic. He had listened unmoved to more than one powerful preacher. Even the fervency of Finney had not touched him. In Chicago, one day, he attended a meeting conducted by Mr. Moody. He went from curiosity to see how such meetings were carried on. The evangelist arose and read the parable of the Prodigal Son. And when he came to the words: "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"; just there and then a new feeling came to the heart of the skeptic. He could not explain it, nor could he even resist it. He only knew that there was a desire in his heart for such a Father as that. When the evangelist called for men to stand upon their feet to ask for prayer, the skeptic was the first to arise. And when an after-meeting was announced, he went quickly into the room. The man who said, "I will not," that night repented and went into the vineyard.

More than one person in this audience is like this first son. You have never said this sentence in words, but your action has framed it. And now, it may be, the hour has come for you to change your course, to give up your rebellious will, and turn into the pathway of the vineyard. It is a command that God gives,

but is full of tender solicitude, the eagerness and anxiety of a father: "Son, go work today in my vineyard." The call to the vineyard is being sounded now, and you must not resist it.

Are you like the first of the two sons? You will notice that the Lord's parable convicted these priests and elders at once. "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" Jesus asked, and they were compelled to answer, "The first." There was no escaping it, for the first son, became at last *obedient*. I would like you to keep this word in mind as we talk about this parable today, for this is the test after all—*obedience*. And I think it is true that some of us, if we face this issue fairly today, will feel ourselves self-convicted. We have been hearing a great deal about Jesus, and even believing a great deal about him, and now the question that I press home upon you—may the Spirit of God press it home—is this: Have you obeyed Him, have you taken up His cross, have you entered His vineyard for service? The Lord commended the first son because he repented *and went*.

But look a little more intently at the second son. There are some things about the Scripture that are very melancholy, that bring sadness to the heart. This is one of them—the picture of a man who was weak in action, a mere sentimentalist. Jesus takes but a single sentence for the description. But brief as it is, it is sufficient to tell us a great deal about human life that we know already from experience. "He answered and said, I go, sir; *and went not*." I

confess that this seems to me one of the saddest sentences ever written. How prompt and fair his sentence was, "I go, sir." But in the presence of the Lord of Reality, this son stands pilloried before the world as an easy-going sentimentalist, who, despite his fair words, lacked the power of action.

We say that he was weak in action. He was like this watch of mine. How often I have taken it out of my pocket and wound and shaken it. It is a beautiful piece of workmanship, all embossed and jeweled. With what a fair face it looks up to me to say, "I go, sir." And a half-hour later I take it out of my pocket to discover that it is standing still. The jeweler will tell me the trouble after a moment's inspection—"weak in its action." My watch is the second son of the parable; its sentiments are fair, but its action is weak.

We call him a sentimentalist because this is the word by which we describe any man who, however fair his sentiments may be, does not follow them up by suitable action. The term does not decry sentiment, for sentiment is at the very basis of life itself. Our sentiment on the subject of religion must be as strong as possible, by which I mean our judgment and conviction, our belief and feeling. Jesus has the power to awaken our sentiment, and he must do so. But that is not all. If it had been all, then the second son of the parable would have been commendable. If we do not act our sentiments, if we do not fix our judgment in some action of our will, and in the deeds

of life, then sentiment begins to dwindle and shrivel, and becomes a paltry thing. That man is a sentimentalist who allows his sentiments to stand unsupported by action. A tree might have its full quota of leaves, and they might be very beautiful. But you know a tree must fix its life to a root, it must commit itself, so to say, by an act of gripping the earth; otherwise its leaves will soon shrivel, and their very beauty will be in vain.

This, I think, is the great lesson of this parable. It sets forth in the case of the second son the peril of a man who allows his life to drivel away in fine thoughts—thoughts to which he never really grips his life because he never actually brings them to the test of action. And I do not know of anything a man can do that is more dangerous to himself than just this. It is especially so because it is so easy to deceive one's self about this. A man will say: "There is no trouble with my thinking about these things. My sentiments are right; they will pass muster anywhere." One thing this man forgets, that none of our sentiments are safe; I mean our moral sentiments, until we have fixed and anchored them in some definite action of our wills, in some high resolution of the soul that shall fitly represent the soul's sentiments. Scarcely any human spectacle is so melancholy as that of a man who clings, even unto old age, to the shriveled shape of some fine sentiment of his early years—a sentiment that has paled and palled upon his hands because he has never led it forth into

action, never permitted it to breathe the ozone of the open air. All his life long he has said, like the second son: "I go, sir, and went not." And the very beauty of his own thought has turned dry in his hands, and at the end he has naught but empty and ghost-like phantoms to comfort him. It is the sure result where action does not accompany sentiment. We say in our maxim "fine words butter no parsnips." But our students of psychology go much farther, and tell us that fine words alone leave not only dry parsnips, but a dry life. And our Lord goes farther still and tells us that fine words, without action, will keep a man out of the Kingdom of heaven. For did He not say to these quibbling priests and elders: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you"? These publicans and harlots were actually going into the Kingdom, whilst these priests were simply *saying*, "I go, sir, and went not."

Let us recognize this truth then, that no great moral idea of the soul is safe within us or sufficient for life's purposes, until we have gripped it to the soul by what we call conviction, or by what we describe as decision, or by what we define by this other word, *resolution*.

There was a woman whom I knew some years ago, who, in early life, and all through her middle years, had washed her face with some kind of enamel. She was an old woman when I knew her, and she was still doing that artificial thing. But the beauty of her

complexion had long since fled, and the skin of her face looked dry and withered. She had closed up the pores of her skin so tightly as to leave no life in it at all. She had clogged the very juices of life. Poor, old woman, with the white enamel on her withered face—I can see her even now. But not so sorrowful is this as the spectacle of one who has never given any power and grace of action to the best sentiments of his soul.

Or to choose another kind of illustration—an illustration from history and literature. Our gifted American author, James Russell Lowell, has written a most discriminating essay on the French philosopher and moralist of the eighteenth century, Rousseau. His writings were fine in the extreme. Many of his sentiments were as lofty as have ever been uttered. He breathed a spirit of benevolence for the whole human species, which was easily mistaken for love. Yet, when Rousseau visited England, Edmund Burke wrote of him as “the great professor and founder of the philosophy of vanity.” His biographers tell us that his home life was an enigma, and that though he melted with pity towards those who were but remotely related to him, without one natural pang he sent his own children to a hospital for foundlings. With good reason does Lowell entitle his essay about this man, “The Sentimentalists.”

If these words and these illustrations seem hard, they are no harder than our Lord’s parable, wherein he shows us how unlovely it is for a son to say to his

father, "I go, sir," and yet not to go. The Master is cutting a pathway straight to the heart of the trouble that is keeping many of us back. He is warning us against mere sentiment, against poverty of action. He is bidding us not to put asunder *thought* and *action*, which God at life's marriage altar has joined together. Is there not a great deal for us to think about as we picture this second son of the parable to ourselves? Is the second son in this audience now? If so, may God help me to speak to his heart at this moment.

If the second son is really here, let me say to him that it is time to crystallize all his true and beautiful sentiments about Jesus into *an act of belief*. I am right in assuming that you cherish such sentiments, am I not? How can any help having them? Jesus is so winsome, so fascinating in all his life and character. His work among men has been so wonderful, so transforming. There is a weird tale by Hawthorne, about a professor, who brewed a strange elixir, and some drops of it falling upon the ground, touched a stunted plant and brought it to fullness of life. And this is what Jesus Christ has been doing all these centuries, and now, more than ever, He is touching human life to make it *live*. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." An entire library of books could not tell what He has done. This is what the Apostle John says, you remember, in the last verse of his gospel: "If they should be written every one, I suppose that

even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

And yet it is almost a fatality of the history of Jesus that so many have stopped short with admiration. It is easy to admire Jesus, and not to go any farther. It may be, I think, that some of his immediate disciples were in that danger. This explains why he halted them now and again and asked them such a question as this: "What think ye of Christ?" It may be that Peter showed this tendency to his Master's understanding. The great buoyant nature of this splendid disciple responded heartily to the Master's inspiring presence: "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." It was a noble sentiment, yet in the moment of its utterance, this disciple was trembling on the brink of his denial. Jesus knew it, too, and warned him. There was some doubt in Jesus' mind as to whether this strong disciple, with all his fine feeling for his Master, had ever really committed himself to an absolute belief in Him. And after the sad time was over, and Jesus, following the Resurrection, showed himself to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, we find him going to the bottom of the matter with Peter in his thrice repeated question: "Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest* thou me?" And I do not doubt that our Lord would like to go to the bottom of the matter with many of us, that we might know for ourselves what feelings we have toward Him; whether, indeed, we have feelings only,

or whether we have also convictions, beliefs, and whether we have made real decisions about him.

There was a time when I wondered about those passages in the New Testament, where Jesus forbids different persons to tell about the miracles that he had wrought upon them. There is a side of that action of His that is very plain, in view of what has just been said. Our Lord was chary about the kind of feeling that comes from miracles. However useful, and even necessary, the miracles were, men might get little more than a spirit of enthusiastic admiration from them. And this was not what he wanted in men; he wanted a great and absolute belief.

I think you will see what I mean, and I ask you frankly to consider the case for yourself. You are satisfied with Jesus, are you not? You have only the profoundest respect for Him, like that company of workingmen in London, who took off their caps when His name was mentioned by their leader. But that is not all, that is not what the New Testament means to us. It is so easy to be satisfied with these complacent feelings about Jesus. But let me point out the difficulty. They do not carry a man into the vineyard. They are too much like the second son of our Lord's parable—they seem to say, "I go, sir," but they do not go anywhere. And today you are just where you were years ago, thinking the same pleasant thoughts about Christ, but never having really taken a step towards His vineyard. "I go, sir," said the second son, "and went not." You will forgive me if I try to

press this home upon some who are here now. May God help some one to see it and to feel it, too. With all your pleasant feeling for Christ, you must acknowledge that you have not dealt with Him considerately. You have given Him good words, and pleasant opinions, and what He wants is *belief*. There is no mistaking the New Testament about this. It is calling men always to believe. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "Believe and be baptized." "These things are written that ye might believe." Do you think that the early disciples could have gone forth to do their work with anything less than an absolute faith in Christ? Do you think that the Church of Christ could have been built on a feeling? A thousand time, No. Men only do great things when their souls are anchored to some great faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

I summon you then to believe, to lay hold upon Christ with a faith that will unite you forever to Christ. "Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." If there are any of us who are not joined to Christ in this way, we are likely to turn out as the second son of the parable did. We shall never get to the vineyard at all, or never stay there. Men must lay hold of Jesus Christ strongly. I ask you to do that now—*now*. Will you do it? Will you do it now? Lay hold upon Him as your Savior. There is no other name so great as that, and men must call upon Him in that way if they are to be saved.

There is a story of missionary life in Africa which has touched me. A missionary had labored for a long time in the interior somewhere, among the natives, but their language was so poor that he could not even tell them about Christ and his gospel. There was no word in the language to express the idea of a Savior; at least, the missionary had never heard it, and he despaired of being even able to help them understand the idea. One day a native fell into the river and another leaped after him to rescue him. When the rescuer came ashore with the half-drowned man, the tribe set up a shout. They gathered about him, enthusiastically; they called him by a new name. It was the word that the missionary had been waiting for—Savior!

Who is here who will arise and call Jesus by the new name? Surely, he deserves the title. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” And I would that there might be many in this hour who shall commit themselves to one great act of the soul—the greatest that the soul is capable of—an act of belief in Jesus Christ.

This case of the second son should help any of us who are hesitating, too, to see that we owe to Jesus *an act of obedience*. “Son, go work today in my vineyard.” There is nothing hazy about this, and when the second son fails, he fails in an act of obedience to the Lord of the vineyard. Many men are in this case. Is there not a man listening to me now who has more than once been upon the point of becoming a Christian? You have said many times as you have

heard the Gospel: "Yes, it is all true; grandly true, and I need it." And you have said almost the words of the second son, "I go, sir," and then you have not gone. In short, you have not met the test of obedience. It is very pitiful to think about, how near you have been to Christ, and how near he has been to you.

"So near, so very near, to God,
Nearer I could not be,
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He."

And yet you have not really gone into the vineyard. Have you lacked in resolution? Apparently, the second son was weak in this, and he slips out of the pathway to the vineyard, because he had not flung himself, heart and soul, into one great irretrievable *resolution*. Men do need this if they are to come to Christ, and I hope that you see it in the light of this parable. I was talking to a gentleman past sixty the other day, and in a meditative moment of the conversation, he went down into that sub-conscious well of the memory, where they say so many things of the past are buried, and drew forth this precious bit of wisdom, which, he said, used to be given him as a "copy" away back in his schooldays in Canada:

"Hard upon hard makes a poor stone wall,
But soft upon soft makes none at all."

And I thought of how it is that not even Jesus Christ can build up the wall of salvation for a man, unless the man himself will cease building "soft upon

soft," and will build into the wall his own beliefs and resolutions, and his acts of obedience toward the Savior. You will surely see what I mean, and I think it ought to appeal to some of us. Resolve to do what Jesus Christ asks you to do. He calls upon you to repent, and you cannot build the wall without repentance. He calls upon you to turn to Him and to be baptized in His name, and thus to wear the badge of discipleship. He calls upon you to follow Him, to take up your cross, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And you cannot build the wall without putting in these resolutions and acts of your own.

He calls upon you to make an open confession of Him, and He calls upon you also to sit at His table and eat the bread and drink the wine of the Sacrament "in remembrance of Him."

And I now ask this second son, if he is here—the man who has not yet gone into the vineyard, the man who has been very near, but has never crossed the threshold, the man who has even promised some time, but has never actually gone; the man who has high opinions of Christ, but has never obeyed—if the second son is here, I ask him now: *Will you listen to the command of your Lord now, and will you obey out of a full heart?* For all the fine sentiments in the world will not bring you to Jesus until you believe on Him in your heart, and obey Him in your life.

XIX
THE AFTER-MEETING

J. WILBUR CHAPMAN, D.D.

XIX

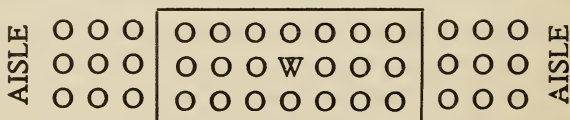
THE AFTER-MEETING

THERE is no part of our work in which more care should be exercised than the after-service. If it becomes formal, this at once lessens its effectiveness; and, if it is too mechanical, it immediately impresses as insincere those who may be somewhat interested. It is most difficult to suggest any rules by which the after-meetings should be conducted; but the experiences of others may be helpful, and it is only with this thought in mind that this chapter is written.

While it is true that sometimes it becomes necessary to appoint an after-service unexpectedly because the impression made by the preacher is so deep, yet the rule is that the after-service must be planned carefully, must be made a subject of constant prayer, and those things must be done to bring people to decision which may be suggested to us by the Holy Spirit, for if we are in a receptive frame of mind He will most assuredly lead us. Those who are trained evangelists, or those who are especially gifted as pastors in the winning of men to Christ, will understand what is meant when we suggest that it is almost better to have no method to which we are wedded, in order that the Holy Spirit may suggest to us some new plan for each meeting we hold.

It is said concerning the meetings of Major Cole, who has won as many people to Christ as possibly any other man in the work today, that no two meetings are ever alike. However, while this is true, yet, as a rule, the after-meeting must be thoroughly planned out. It is comparatively easy to make an impression on an audience if one has a message and believes in the effectiveness of it; to gather the results from the preaching is quite another thing. Personally, I do not know anything better to secure this than the inquirer's card. When the cards are used the following may be adopted with profit:

Divide the church into as many divisions as would give one worker for every thirty or forty people. The following diagram represents a section of three rows, thirty-nine seats, the W being the worker who is expected to reach with cards the twenty people enclosed within the lines, the others being reached by assistants, who may work from the aisles.



The following inquirer's cards have been used with success:

I have an honest desire henceforth to live a Christian life.

I am willing to follow any light God may give me.

I ask the people of God to pray for me.

Name

Residence

Church or Pastor Preferred.....

Usher's Name

DECISION CARD.

Turning from all past sins, and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I do hereby decide, God helping me, henceforth to lead a Christian life. This I do, freely, fully and forever.

Name.....

Date.....

(Please hand or send this card to the pastor.)

Provide the worker with a few of these cards, and it might be well to supply lead pencils, which may be fastened to the cards with a little rubber band. When the sermon has been preached and you are sure there may be an impression, ask the workers to rise and turn quickly to all those who may be sitting near them, offering to them the card which may be in their possession. Explain this card thoroughly to the people before the distribution begins; sometimes it is wise to sing a hymn softly while the work is being done, and sometimes the pastor may continue to urge upon his hearers the necessity of immediate decision, while

the work is going on. In some cases it is well to distribute the cards to every one before an explanation is made and then after each one has a card in his hand, tell them just what you would like to have them do. The Christians in the congregation might take the card which they have received and use it either in the service, or out of it, with those who may not be Christians; those who are not members of the church should be urged to at least take this stand.

When all the cards have been collected, they may be turned over to the minister, and he will have before him a number of names of people who may be approached easily, and, in many cases, quite as easily won to Christ.

There are two things to remember about the Inquirer's Card:

First, that it may, or may not, be a record of a decision, but in any case it is as valuable as if one should sit down in his home and write the minister a letter, saying: "I have an earnest desire to live a Christian life. I am willing to follow any light if God will give it to me, and I ask the people of God to pray for me." If fifty such letters should be written to a pastor in a day, he would think that certainly a great awakening had come to his church.

Second, the inquirer's card is valuable in proportion as it is carefully followed up. It is a rare thing for one who has signed this card to seek out the minister for himself.

Following such a service as this, it would be very

easy to have an after-meeting, and concerning this after-meeting the following suggestions may be made:—

As a rule it is not considered wise to have the after-meeting in the same place as the preaching service. However, if this should be necessary, it is a good plan to ask the people to rise and then state that you expect to hold an after-service, that those are invited who have not yet taken a stand for Christ, that all Christians are expected to stay who may feel the need of a deeper work of grace in their hearts, and that those especially are asked to tarry who may be interested in the conversion of some friend or loved one.

Then state that, if it is necessary for any one to pass out, they may have the privilege of doing so during the singing of this hymn. After the audience has been changed, if the auditorium is large, it is well to draw the people nearer together and then by the singing of a hymn, the offering of brief prayers, and the statements again of the thought of the sermon which has produced conviction, you are ready for the after-meeting work. If it is possible to change the place of meeting, then it is ordinarily wise to ask the people to rise and sing, and then state that during the singing of a hymn the persons above indicated, that is, those not members of the church, Christians desiring a deeper work of grace, and those interested in the conversion of their friends, or loved ones, may pass into the other room during the singing of the hymn, asking all the others to wait until the benediction is

pronounced. The advantage in this plan—rather than to close the meeting and let any one come into the after-service who will—is twofold:

First, if one moves out of a congregation for an after-meeting, he has taken a long step toward Christ.

Second, if he waits until the audience passes out of the church, is slightly impressed, or even has a deep sense of conviction, this may be dispelled and he be swept along with the crowd, and before he realizes it, is out of the church and on his way home. If the change in the place of meeting is thus made, again we are ready for the after-service. The following principles always hold:

In the conduct of a successful after-meeting, the invitation to those who may take their stand for Christ must be given with a kind of holy boldness. The least action of timidity or fear on the part of the leader will defeat his plan. When there is not the very deepest impression, then ask the people to do the easiest thing first; that is, call upon the Christians for some decision, suggest that those who desire to be remembered in prayer for their own growth in grace, or in behalf of their friends, should rise or lift their hands. If the impression is deep, and you know it by intuition, then you may ask those present to do the most difficult thing, and sometimes the more you ask them to do the more willingly do they follow your suggestions.

There are four methods which have usually been adopted in after-meetings:

First, those interested are asked to lift their hands, sometimes while all heads are bowed (but this is not necessary). After the hands have been lifted they are dealt with personally.

Second, they are asked to stand and speak out boldly their determination to come to Christ.

Third, they may be asked to come to the front and kneel at an altar, or one which may be improvised by the placing of chairs in the chapel or church.

Fourth, they may be asked to come to the front and take the minister's hand if they are ready to profess allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. The minister, if he has had any experience at all, will very soon know which one of these plans he may follow; or he may feel that it is not wise to adopt any of them, for there may be suggested to him something very much better.

After the first step has been taken, then we are ready for our dealing with the inquirer. This work may be both general and particular. If the leader of the meeting holds the service in his own hands, humanly speaking, it is well for him to state fully the plan of salvation. One cannot be too particular about this. Sometimes we err in the fact that we imagine the story is so well known that we need not repeat it, but frequently this is a fatal mistake. It is well to make frequent use of good illustrations which aptly illustrate the truth you are presenting. Sometimes the audience may be appealed to for the sake of securing emphasis upon some principle which you have stated, although this is not infrequently dangerous,

for injudicious people may sometimes undo the whole effect of the sermon and the appeal. If the congregation should be appealed to, then let it be stated explicitly that the remarks are to be brief and entirely to the point.

I once heard the late Dr. Maltbie Babcock relate an illustration in which he was telling how easy it was to be a Christian if we would but follow God's plan. He said that Harry Moorehouse, the distinguished evangelist, was a guest in his father's house and that one evening while he was waiting to preach his sermon a child of the household came to the door and opened it. As the evangelist heard the door open he turned to look and the door closed again and no one appeared. Then he heard the sound once more, and without turning, said, "Come in." The child came into his presence and said: "Mr. Moorehouse, I want to be a Christian." "Well," said he, "you may be, for it is very easy," and he asked her to turn to the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah and read the fourth and fifth verses, only he told her to make them personal, and she read them in this way: "Surely he hath borne *my* griefs, and carried *my* sorrows, yet *I* did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for *my* transgressions, he was bruised for *my* iniquities, the chastisement of *my* peace was upon him and with his stripes"—and as she came to this part she suddenly stopped; her eyes filled up with tears, and the minister said, "Read on," and she read, "*I* am healed." "It is just

as easy as this," said Mr. Moorehouse, and the child went away believing. If the dealing is particular and individuals deal with individuals, then make a free use of the Word of God, although, of course, this is not to be neglected in the general work. Such verses as John v. 24, should be frequently used—"Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." And note especially in this verse Jesus states that, if we believe on him, we shall not come into judgment, and we have the immediate possession of eternal life.

The sixth chapter of John and the forty-seventh verse is also most useful: "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." But perhaps there is nothing better than John iii. 16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

A distinguished minister told me that he lived, when a child, in a home, every member of the household being, as he expressed it, a perfect battery of emotion. They insisted that he could be saved only in their way, and he tried, again and again, without success, to find Christ. At last he gave up in despair. One afternoon, when a student, he was sitting under a tree on the campus, and he began to read this verse, John iii. 16, which Luther has called the gospel in a nutshell, and he said: "Why this seems plain; 'for

God so loved the world,' then He must have loved me, for I am part of it; 'that whosoever believeth,' that is a plain statement, and certainly does not pass me by for I am one of that company. If, therefore, this is His word, and I accept it, then, according to His word, I am saved." "And suddenly," he said, "I rose to my feet, clasped my Bible, and said, as I looked up: 'Lord God, I expect to stand upon this promise, I will hold on to it through time, and I will take it with me into Thy very presence at the judgment, and then I must be saved, or it will go hard with the Book'; and almost immediately," he said, "there came a perfect rush of joy, and I have had the consciousness ever since that I was accepted of Him."

No after-meeting should close without all being urged to take a definite stand for Christ, not only in the meeting, but to take immediate steps towards being identified with some church, for it is literally true that it is impossible to find a joyous, successful, fruitful Christian in one who willingly neglects church membership.

XX

CONDITIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL
AFTER-MEETING

JOHN BALCOM SHAW, D.D., LL.D.

XX

CONDITIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL AFTER-MEETING

“IT IS the best service of the day,” its attendants often say to me, and if I were to be as frank with them, I should have to echo that sentiment. For more than eight years now it has been my habit to hold an after-meeting at the close of the regular service whenever I am in my pulpit, and that means practically throughout the year, with the exception of the months of July and August.

In my judgment, there are three or four essential conditions of a successful after-meeting. I shall speak wholly of the human side of this service. Of course, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the primal requisite, and that we shall assume throughout.

I. First of all, I name preparation. The room must have previous attention, being seated advantageously, with the organ or piano in the right place, the hymn books carefully distributed, and the ventilation studiously provided for. The helpers, too, must be carefully prepared for the work—solicitors who seek to induce others to remain for the meeting, the ushers who come promptly to their places when the other service is over, and the workers who hold themselves in readiness to do inquiry work whenever it becomes

necessary. And, most important of all, the leader must come to his part prepared—through long and importunate prayer, unquestionably, but in other ways also. I should say that such preparation should be almost altogether general instead of specific. He must have large resources to draw upon. A cut and dried program will seldom work. All sorts of arrows must be in his quiver. Some he can use one night and must discard another.

A set speech is usually calamitous. What he says must be spontaneous, direct, informal and tender. Ordinarily, the theme upon which I have been preaching is the basis of my own talk—some previous point emphasized or some further thought added.

II. The second essential I would name is variety. Don't do the same thing two Sunday nights running. Vary your method, your program and even your invitation. It is the unexpected which proves the most effective. One night we hold what is exclusively a prayer service, in which a large number take part briefly; another night it will be a testimony meeting, with glowing narrations of experience. A cornet or vocal solo, an anthem by the choir, a familiar hymn upon the harp, a violin selection, and often a new voice to make the address—these are only a few of the means I employ in order to have variety. If a man is at all resourceful, he will never be without something new to bring forward, thus helping to attract the people into the service and interesting them when once they have been gotten there.

III. Optimism and cheer is, I would say, the third essential. A doleful, pessimistic after-meeting is bound to run itself out. The great majority do not like funerals and will never attend them except when they have to. This does not mean that it should be gay or sensational, but it does mean that it should be joyous and uplifting. The Bible speaks often of a solemn joy, and that term best describes my thought when I name this third essential. The object of the after-meeting should be, not only the conversion of sinners, or the commitment of penitents, but quite as much the comfort of saints. There are so many of God's people who are without a positive religious experience, and so many others whose chief need is consolation or reassurance. They are carrying great burdens, or their hearts are racked with anxiety, or the cold hand of sorrow is upon them. This service ought to be made helpful to such, and, when it is, they will usually attend it. Our after-meeting is quite as fruitful in bringing silent and negative Christians out into a positive religious life as in leading impenitent men to conviction, and I am accustomed to account it more, rather than less, successful because of that.

IV. Last in the list, I put sociability, a thing easy to induce, if the service is warm and spiritual. A mere shake of the hand or dropping of a word of fellowship and welcome, is often as potent a factor in the success of the after-meeting as any that can be introduced. In our after-meetings we get hold of lapsed church members, learn the addresses of new people,

introduce young men to one another and pledge them for the Bible classes or regular services. It is quite as much what the after-meeting leads to or opens the way toward, as it is the results secured at the time that renders it a valuable force in the life of our church.

Now, a word or two about the invitation. Seldom do I let a meeting close without an attempt to secure the commitment of those attending it. Sometimes it is a vow of consecration put to Christian people; at other times I ask for an open confession of one's personal acceptance of Jesus, and, still again, those desiring to be prayed for are requested to indicate it. Often an effective thing to do is to ask those who have prayer-requests to prefer to stand and either mention the person or silently name the object to God.

The same variety is aimed at in the form of the response called for. Hands uplifted when heads are bowed has always seemed to me a somewhat cowardly manner of confession, and I use this method less frequently than any. Among other expressions I have required confessors to stand in their places, or come forward and take my hand, and one of the best ways to bring out results is to have cards distributed at a given signal and to plead with those under conviction to sign these. In no particular is variety more important than here. If the people get the notion you are always going to put them to the test, they will not come into the meeting after the first or second time; and if you always conduct this part of the service in

the same way, it will soon grow monotonous and you will lose your grip upon the stated attendants.

Another matter! Let the meeting be brief. The temptation is always to extend it, especially if there is deep and tender feeling; but don't yield to the temptation. Fifteen minutes, usually, is long enough. Then if impressions remain to be clinched, get the few into a side room, or set your inquiry workers to the task of dealing face to face with them. Avoid calling on men to pray who are lengthy; or lay upon them a charge to brevity beforehand, and, if they transgress, strike them off your list of after-meeting helpers. Have the music as bright as possible and see that it begins promptly after the regular service closes.

I have always held my after-meetings in another room, and where there is such a room, I would strongly urge its use. However, if one is not available, it will be easy to employ practically the same methods in the general auditorium. Never plead with the people from the pulpit to stay to this service. Invite them to it, explain its character, and assure them that they will find it helpful, but the moment you go into lengthy appeals in its behalf, you weaken the effect and the possibility of their responding. With a few faithful ones to make the start into the chapel, you are not likely to fail to get a considerable group to follow, and then if the meeting is found uplifting and interesting, those attending are sure to come again.

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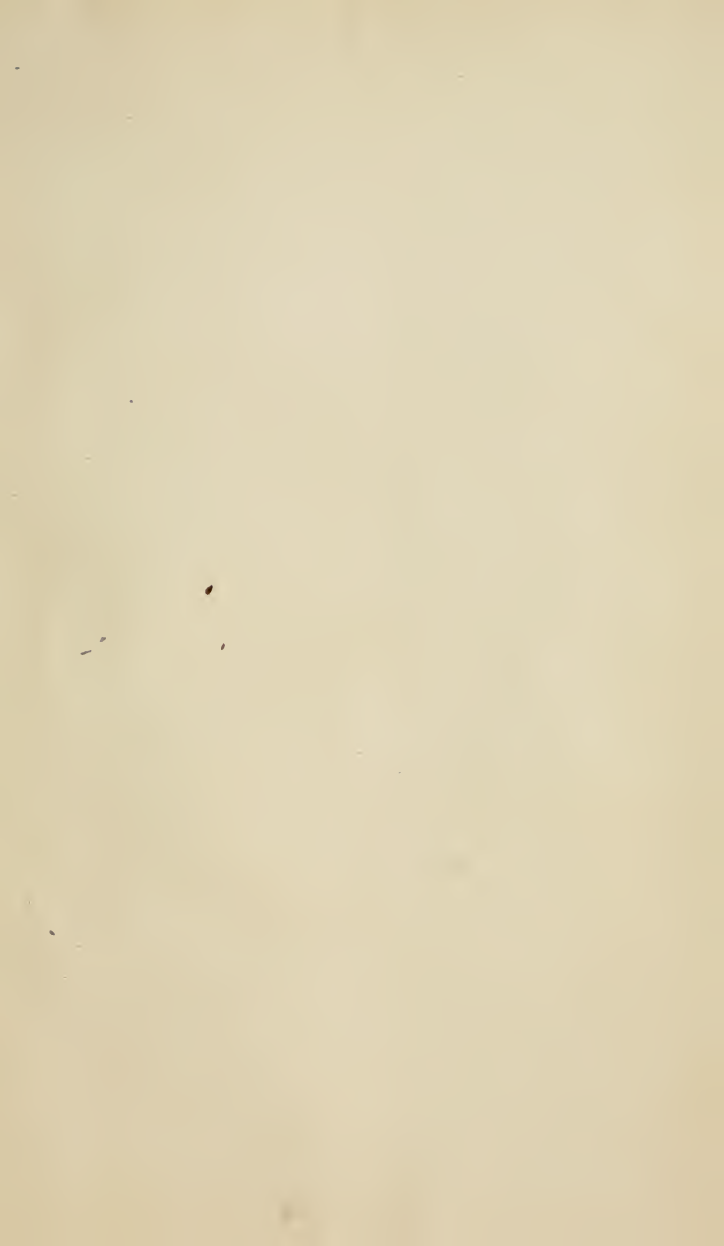
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